The Reproduction of Racism in the Private Recruitment Industry


Geraldine Martin


July 2002

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their support and assistance

- My supervisor, Professor Kevin Durrheim, for his enthusiasm, support and encouragement throughout this study. For providing me with the space to develop my ideas, pushing me beyond what I thought was possible and for allowing me to say "enough now".

- My family, Patricia, Gerald, Patrick, Glen and Carla, for supporting me in my return to university.

- My friends who kept telling me I would get there: Jane Ingham, Jane Callaghan, Nick, Paddy, Dan, Kerry, Wendy and Blye. A special thanks to Blye for his diligent reading, comments and assistance in editing.

- The recruitment consultants who spoke to me. Without them this study would not have happened.

- The National Research Foundation for their financial support and assistance, which allowed me to pursue this study.

# Abstract

"But you've got to make sure you communicate in the right way [laughs] so that no one else knows what you're talking about. [Laughing]" (Interview 1)

The study examines the rhetoric of 'racial' exclusion used by South African private recruitment consultants to justify racist practice, criticise employment equity and deny racism. The dilemmatic nature of clients racially based requests is understood in a context that socially and legally forbids "unfair discrimination" and racist practice.

The reader is provided with an overview of the legislation as it pertains to recruitment and the psychological study of 'race' in order to locate this study within its historical context. An historical context of segregation and resistance to changes in employment practices.

We examine how South African psychology has investigated 'race' and racism – past and present. Psychology has traditionally explained 'white' resistance to transformation in terms of 'racial' prejudice. These attitudinal approaches fail to explicate the role of language in the reproduction and conservation of these historical patterns. By providing the reader with an historical overview "interpretative connections" (Wetherell and Potter, 1992) will be established that assist in the analysis of the text.

Transcribed interviews with nine private recruitment consultants in two urban centres in South Africa serve as textual evidence. The analysis demonstrates the rhetorical strategies employed by consultants in their conversations, discussions, negotiations, criticism and justification of the conservation of historical employment patterns. Private recruitment consultants engage in a number of rhetorical manoeuvres that appeal to 'white' norms and construct 'black' as a requirement and deficient. The construction of 'white' and 'black' serves as a platform for justifying the historically established 'racial' hierarchy and conserving 'racial' privilege. Consultants construct their practice as a 'reasonable' response to clients' blatant 'racially' based requests for candidates. This is done by splitting racism into 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable' racism. 'Unreasonable' racism is defined as explicit / blatant acts that are located externally and in the past. This splitting functions to distance

recruitment consultants from the racist practices of their clients and to counter potential accusations of racism. Their arguments function ideologically to defend the historical status quo in employment and criticise social transformation in South Africa.

The study concludes with recommendations for the private recruitment industry in South Africa and suggests future areas of study using a discursive approach. The analysis highlights the need for external auditing of the private recruitment agencies to ensure the enactment and successful implementation of the Employment Equity Act of 1998 and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act of 2000. Furthermore, more detailed analysis of the object of racism, namely the construction of 'whiteness', could be useful in understanding resistance to transformation in the private sector and the (re)production of racism.

# Table of Contents

# 1. 'Race' and Recruitment in South Africa

## 1.1. Introduction

In studying the discursive practices of private recruitment consultants it is important that we have an understanding of South Africa's history, which is steeped in an official policy of segregation on the basis of 'race'. The contested nature of the labour market can be viewed within a context of shifting labour demands, job reservation on the basis of 'race' and attempts to conserve historical power relations. This historical and social account provides a backcloth for later interpretative connections.

This chapter will orientate readers less familiar with South African employment legislation – past and present. A background to this study is the apartheid policies and their pervasive influence on society through statutory and non-statutory means. This section provides a chronological overview of non-statutory and statutory controls pertaining to job reservation. The intention of this chapter is to demonstrate the manner in which statutory legislation informed non-statutory practices and vice versa. Non-statutory forms of discrimination often preceded the implementation of statutory job reservation.

## 1.2. An historical overview

Recruitment agencies were present from the late 19th Century. These agencies (namely Witwatersrand Labour Association established in 1896 and the Native Recruiting Corporation established in 1912) specialised in the recruitment of African labour for the mines. Access to work was controlled through these recruitment agencies and they fixed 'black' wages. 'Black' workers were therefore unable to freely compete in the labour market for employment. Thus private recruitment agencies controlled access to employment, a practice that I will argue, persists to this day.

The Regulations of the Mines and Works Act of 1911 was one of the first enactments of 'job colour bar' legislation. This was incorporated into the Mines and Works Amendment Act of 1926, which reserved certain skilled and responsible positions for 'whites' on the mines.

A non-statutory extension of job reservation was the agreement between the Chamber of Mines and 'white' workers that declared:

"the status quo as existing on each mine with regard to the relative scope of employment of European and Coloured employees should be maintained, that is to say that no billets which are held by European workmen should be given to Coloured workmen and vice versa" (Report of the Mining Industry Board, 1922: 5 as cited in Johnstone, 1994: 122)

The privileges afforded 'white' unionised employees was extended with the Industrial Conciliation Act, No. 11 of 1924. In this Act 'employee' was defined to exclude 'black' people in the Transvaal and Natal from participating in the statutory industrial council system (Webster, Alfred, Bethlehem, Joffe and Selikow, 1994; Wiehahn, Botes, Drummond, du Toit, Grobbelaar, Hechter, van der Walt, Mokoatle, Munsook, Neethling, Nieuwoudt, Steenkamp, Sutton, and van der Merwe, 1982: xxi).

In 1937 the Chamber of Mines, and in 1941 the coal mining industry reached a closed shop agreement with racially segregated 'white' unions. This "raised the ultimate barrier to the advance of other groups into skilled positions" (Wiehahn et al., 1982: 679). This system of statutory work reservation (Wiehahn et al.: xxiv) and preservation was extended with the Industrial Conciliation Act, No. 28 of 1956. These Acts circumscribed 'black' advancement by protecting 'white' workers, resulting in an increased marginalisation of 'non-white' workers.

The Bantu Labour Amendment Act of 1970 was designed to maintain job reservation by permitting the upward mobility of African workers into semi-skilled positions while allaying the fears of 'white' workers. The state could "prohibit the employment of Africans in any job, in any area or in the service of any employer" (Crankshaw, 1997: 46). It defined the conditions under which African advancement could occur, namely:

- The proper separation of 'races' in the workplace
- That no 'white' worker would be replaced by a 'black' worker
- 'Black' workers were not to be in authority over 'white' workers
- 'Black' advancement would not occur without the consent of the 'white' unions

(Crankshaw, 1997)

Various factors resulted in a change in employment policies. A growing shortage of skilled and semi-skilled labour resulted in African advancement in the labour market. This growing

demand for skilled and semi-skilled labour was unable to be met by the available number of 'white' workers. This increase in demand for 'black' workers was accompanied by 'white' resistance; a trend that continues today.

Alongside this was a growing conscientisation amongst 'black' workers that resulted in industrial and political unrest in the face of this repressive separatist system.

The appointment of the Wiehahn Commission of Inquiry was an attempt by government to reassess labour legislation. Recommendations made by the Commission to eliminate unjustifiable discrimination between the different population groups did not translate into real changes in the labour market. Non-statutory job reservation persisted despite changes in legislation due to 'white' resistance (Cooper, Shindler, McCaul, Brouard, Mareka, Seimon, Markovitz, Machabela, Pickard-Cambridge and Hamilton, 1988).

Statutory and non-statutory job reservation worked alongside each other to entrench the position of workers along 'racial' lines. Growing demands to include 'black' workers in the labour market were accompanied by 'white' resistance to conserve the historical employment patterns.

## 1.3. Post-apartheid Labour Legislation: A review and response

After the first general elections in 1994, the government of national unity effected labour legislation as part of the reconstruction of the socio-political arena. Apartheid laws were repealed. The Constitution declared that "No person shall be unfairly discriminated against, directly or indirectly" on the grounds of amongst other things 'race', ethnic or social origin, colour, culture or language.

This signalled a statutory change from apartheid and was followed by a number of laws to prohibit unfair discrimination and promote equity in the private and public sector. Three pieces of legislation concerned themselves directly with the recruitment and selection of candidates:

- Public Service Laws Amendment Act, 1997
- Employment Equity Act, 1998

- Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, 2000.

### 1.3.1. Public Service Laws Amendment Act of 1997

This Act stated that public service appointments must ensure that government departments were broadly representative of the South African population, with regard to 'race', sex and disability. The 'affirmative action' clause included in the act, was a response to a challenge by a group of 'white' male state attorneys who instituted court action against the minister of justice, because they were not considered for promotion (Sidiropolous, Jeffrey, Forgey, Chipps, Corrigan, Mophuting, Helman, Dimant, 1998: 229). The amendment guaranteed that 'affirmative action' positions or promotions could not be challenged in court and did not constitute "unfair discrimination". The government, as an employer, was implementing employment practices to reflect the demographics of the country and serving as an example to the private sector.

### 1.3.2. Employment Equity Act, 1998

The Employment Equity Act, 1998 was an acknowledgement of the "disparities in employment, occupation and income within the national labour market" (p.2) as a result of apartheid. Laws and conditions of systematic disadvantage had been produced that could not be remediated by simply repealing apartheid laws. The Act was intended to:

- redress the effects of past unfair discrimination (this included 'race', ethnic or social origin and colour);
- ensure the "equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce" (Employment Equity Act, 1988: 22);
- eliminate unfair workplace discrimination; and
- accelerate the training and promotion of designated groups (meaning 'African', 'Coloured' and 'Indian' ('black') people, women and people with disabilities).

It imposed on employers "a prohibition against unfair discrimination ... and was backed by the reversal of the normal onus of proof" (Sidiropoulos et al., 1998: 229).

Employers with a workforce of over fifty employees or an annual turnover in excess of specified thresholds were legally required to develop and implement employment equity

plans. These plans should indicate the timeframe within which these 'numerical goals' for equitable representation would be achieved. The Act included penalties for contraventions thereof, ranging from R500 000 to R900 000.

The Act also addressed "unfair discrimination". Affirmative action and the exclusion and preference of "any person on the basis of an *inherent requirement of a job*" (Employment Equity Act, 1998, italics included for emphasis) were not considered 'unfair discrimination'. However, discrimination based on the "inherent requirement of a job" has left the way open for discriminatory practice (Hunter, Durrheim, Richter, Wilson and Asafo-Agyei, 2000). Non-compliance with the requirements of legislation may be justified and legitimated by the defence of "job requirement".

### 1.3.3. Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, 2000

The Preamble to the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (2000) acknowledges that: "systematic inequalities and unfair discrimination remain deeply embedded in social structures, practices and attitudes, undermining the aspirations of our constitutional democracy" (p.10). The aim of the Act is to:

- promote equality,
- prohibit unfair discrimination on various grounds (namely, age, belief, birth, colour, conscience, culture, disability, ethnic origin, gender, language, marital status, pregnancy, 'race', religion, sex, and sexual orientation),
- prohibit the advocacy of hatred based on 'race', ethnicity, gender or religion,
- provide measures to facilitate the eradication of unfair discrimination, and
- supply procedures to determine where discrimination was unfair.

The Act defines 'race' discrimination in employment as:

- propagating any ideas which propound "the racial superiority or inferiority of any person";
- engaging in practices that promote "exclusivity, based on race";
- excluding people under practices that appear legitimate but which are "actually aimed at maintaining exclusive control by a particular 'race' group" (p.7); and

- the denial of access to opportunities and services and failure to accommodate the needs of such

The Act makes provision for the establishment of an Equality Court to establish the veracity of claims lodged, but as yet has not been tested in the public arena.

### 1.3.4. Responses to employment equity

In a review of South African Survey from 1993 to 2001 a number of companies report the implementation of employment equity as outlined in Figure 1.1. The South African Survey is an annual publication of the South African Institute of Race Relations that provides commentary on and presents research conducted in the social, economic and political arena for the previous year.

**Implementation of Employment Equity Policies**

**Figure 1.1**                                Taken from South African Survey 1993 - 2001
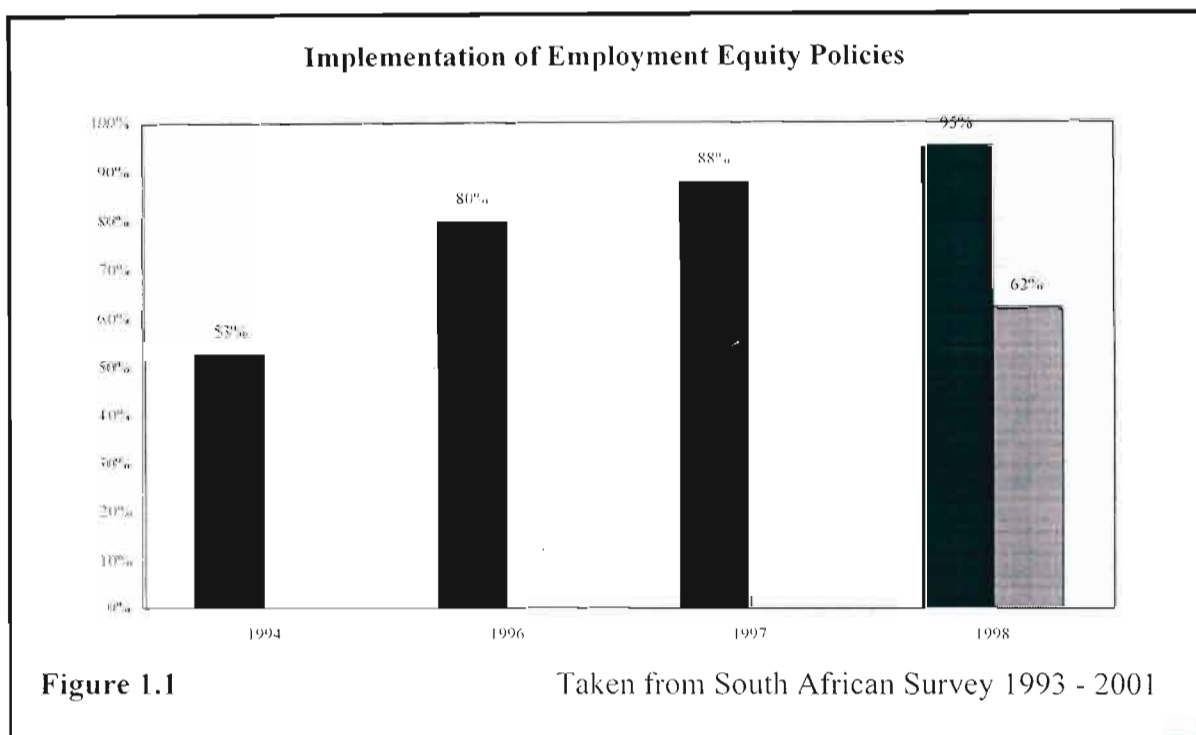
Fifty three percent of companies have implemented affirmative action policies at executive level (FSA – Contact survey cited in Sidiropoulos. Mashabela, Mackay, Gordon-Brown, Frielinghaus, Musiker, Swanepoel, Gallocher and Forgey, 1995: 484). Two years later, eighty percent of companies reported implementing affirmative action (Black Management Forum an Ernst & Young Management study cited in Sidiropoulos, Jeffrey, Mackay, Forgey,

Chipps and Corrigan, 1997: 370). In the following year eighty eight percent of companies surveyed reported a formal or informal affirmative action policy (FSA – Contact cited in Sidiropolous et al., 1998: 225); in 1998, ninety five percent of companies surveyed had implemented affirmative action policies with 'black' people holding 12% of senior positions in this year (FSA – Contact survey cited in Forgey, Jeffery, Sidiropoulos, Smith, Corrigan, Mophuthing, Helman, Redpath and Dimant, 2000: 249). However certain surveys indicate contrary findings. In June 1999 Andrew Levy and Associates found that 62% of companies surveyed had implemented an affirmative action policy between 1982 and 1996 (Forgey, Dimant, Corrigan, Mophuting, Spratt, Pienaar, and Nyanisile, 2001: 334).

Newspaper advertising between 1976 and 1996 indicates an increasing trend in specifying "equal opportunity" in job advertisements (Figure 1.2) and were interpreted by Hunter et al. as indicating "a decreasing trend in overt discrimination" (p.60).



**Figure 1.2**                                      Reproduced from Hunter et al., 2000: 61
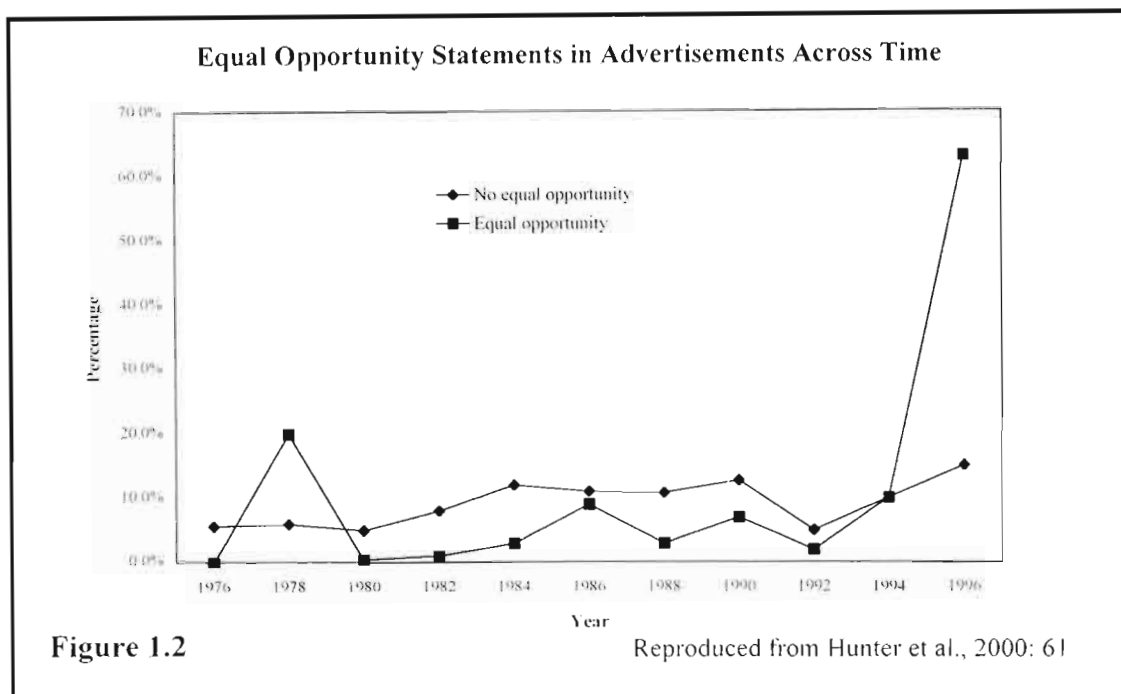
Despite claims that real changes in employment practices had been occurring for some time, the Hunter et al. (2000) study reveals that it is only with the new government that this started to happen. The demand for equal opportunity candidates increased dramatically between 1994 and 1996 as is reflected in the number of equal opportunity specifications, particularly within the public sector (29% versus 7% in the private sector).

Furthermore advertising by direct employers was more likely to contain equal opportunity specifications than those by recruitment agencies (Hunter et al., 2000) as indicated in Figure 1.3.

**Comparison in Advertising
Employers and Recruitment Agencies**



**Figure 1.3**                                                    Hunter et al, 2000: 62
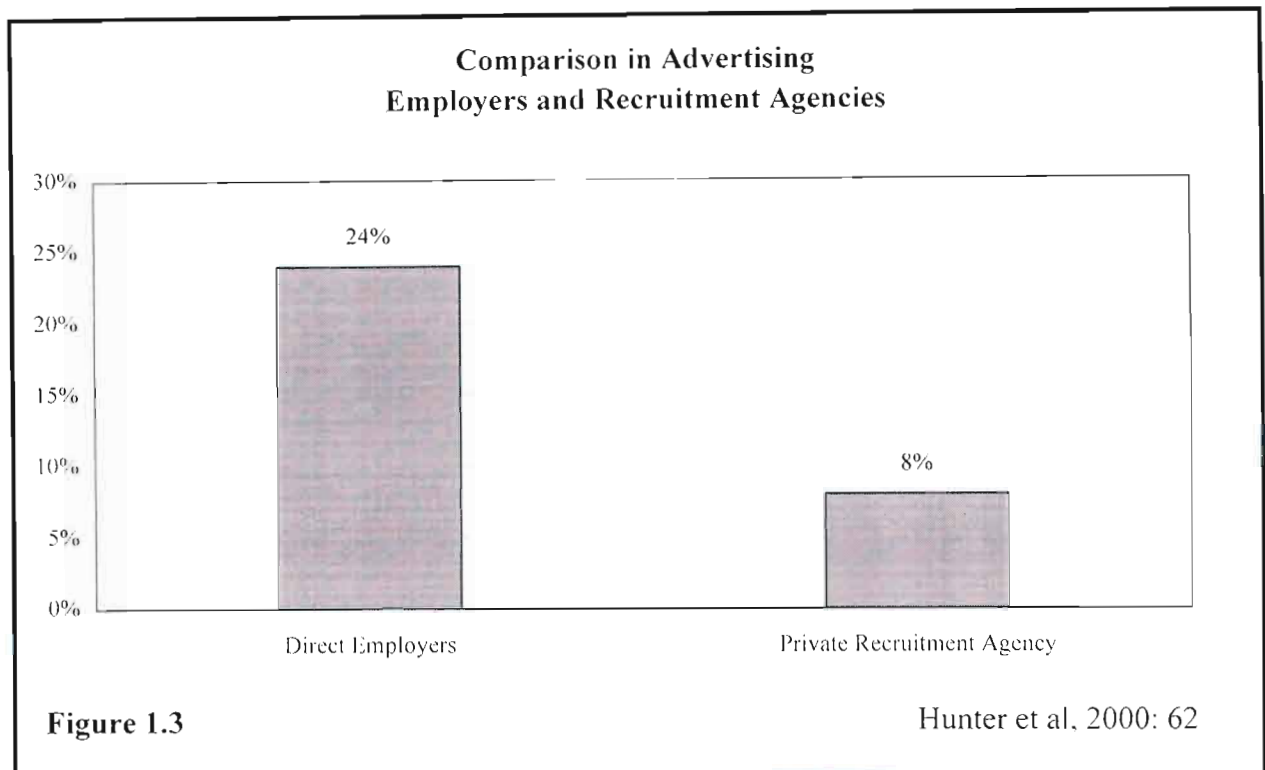
Hunter et al. (2000) argue that despite these changes, subtle tactics of exclusion persist and that "anonymous" advertising by using recruitment agencies (only 8% specified equal opportunity versus the 24% by direct employers) is a way of shirking the responsibility of employment equity (p. 64 – 65). Furthermore the choice of advertising medium may itself be a form of discrimination (Hunter et al., 2000; Human Rights Commission [HRC], 2000).

This increase in demand for employment equity candidates needs to be viewed in the light of available statistics concerning the implementation of employment equity plans in the private sector.

Very few surveys amongst the available research allow for comparison over a sufficient period of time. The two surveys below elucidate the limited impact that employment equity appears to have had on the private sector.

| Racial composition of a sample of South African companies: 1989 – 1995* (Proportion of total for occupational category) | | African | Coloured | Indian | White |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Position | | | | | |
| Senior Managers | 1989 | 0.1% | 0.3% | 0.3% | 99.3% |
| | 1992 | 1.1% | 0.3% | 0.5% | 98.2% |
| Middle Managers | 1989 | 1.0% | 0.8% | 1.0% | 97.2% |
| | 1992 | 1.5% | 1.3% | 6.5% | 91.0% |
| Professionals | 1989 | 4.8% | 4.5% | 4.7% | 86.0% |
| | 1992 | 6.0% | 5.3% | 5.5% | 83.2% |

\* FSA – Contact survey of 71 companies in various sectors of the South African economy in 1989 and 1992.

(Cooper, Hamilton, Mashabela, MacKay, Sidiropoulos, Gordon-Brown, Murphy, and Felinghaun, 1994: 467)

**Table 1.1**

| Change in occupation within population groups October 1995 and October 1999 (Proportion of total for 'race' category) | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Occupation | African | | Coloured | | Indian | | White | |
| | 1995 | 1999 | 1995 | 1999 | 1995 | 1999 | 1995 | 1999 |
| Elementary | 40.5% | 33.3% | 40.0% | 32.7% | 6.0% | 7.8% | 1.8% | 3.3% |
| Artisan/Operator | 25.0% | 32.9% | 27.6% | 29.2% | 29.4% | 24.8% | 22.0% | 15.8% |
| Clerk / Sales | 19.6% | 19.5% | 22.4% | 22.7% | 34.9% | 33.3% | 34.4% | 29.9% |
| Man. / Prof | 14.9% | 14.3% | 10.0% | 15.4% | 29.6% | 34.0% | 41.8% | 51.0% |

(Statistics South Africa: October household survey of 1999: 57)

**Table 1.2**

Table 1.1 indicates a slight increase in the percentage of African, Coloured and Indian workers represented at a senior management, middle management and professional level between 1989 and 1992 prior to the 1994 General Elections and the Acts of 1998 and 2000.

The comparative survey in Table 1.2 examines the distribution of occupations within a particular 'race' group and a more disturbing picture emerges. Unfortunately comparison between these two surveys is impossible due to different occupational category descriptors and methods of presenting results.

Table 1.2 indicates that the percentage of African workers in Artisan / Operator occupation has increased, whereas the percentage at management / professional level has declined slightly. The intention of the statutory framework is that there would be a decline in the percentage of 'white' workers in management / professional occupations. The survey indicates an increase in the percentage of 'white' workers represented in management / professional occupations. Employers appear to be selectively applying employment equity, one of the reasons for the current study.

| 'Race' Group | Top Management (%) | Professionally qualified & experienced specialists and mid-management (%) |
|---|---|---|
| African female | 2.6 | 3.9 |
| African male | 9.7 | 10.1 |
| Coloured female | 0.6 | 1.1 |
| Coloured male | 0.6 | 3.5 |
| Indian female | 0.0 | 2.2 |
| Indian male | 2.6 | 5.7 |
| White female | 11.0 | 21.7 |
| White male | 72.9 | 51.8 |

**Table 1.3**                                   **Sunday Times Business Times July 7 2002**

The latest research, outlined in Table 1.3, suggests that the majority of top management (73.9%), professionally qualified, experienced specialist and mid-management positions (73.5%) are occupied by 'white' males and females.

Despite a growing demand for employment equity candidates, as evidenced in research conducted by Hunter et al. (2000) and reports of the implementation of employment equity in the workplace; the available statistics indicate that the intention of government has not materialised in practice in the private sector.

## 1.4. Resistance to employment equity

'White' resistance to changes in labour legislation were cited as the cause for the slow integration of 'races' in the labour force in the 1970s and 1980s (Cooper et al., 1988). Recent studies report resistance to employment equity implementation. An increasing number of companies report that they "felt their affirmation action programme was 'totally or somewhat unsuccessful'... from 22% in 1996 to 32% in 1997" (FSA – Contact survey cited in Sidiropolous et al., 1998: 226).

The Deloitte & Touché Human Capital Corporation (2001) survey indicated that seventy eight percent of respondents experienced resistance from white employees to the implementation of employment equity, which is often viewed as "reverse discrimination" (p. 52) by 'white' employees. Seventy two percent of 'black' employees perceived "that nothing had changed" (p.52) since the Acts of 1998 and 2000. We therefore obtain a picture of very little real change in the private sector, despite the rhetoric of transformation and legislation advocating equality for all.

The most common barriers perceived by respondents to the implementation of employment equity occur in the recruitment procedures (71%), the advertising of positions (50%), the selection criteria (71%) and the appointment (36%) (Deloitte & Touché Human Capital Corporation, 2001: 32). This results in the continued practice of selecting candidates using 'racial' criteria.

These surveys indicate the necessity for a critical investigation of the private recruitment industry. Although 'white' resistance to employment equity is described, little attempt has been made to explicate this resistance. Furthermore this resistance persists and racism is reproduced despite legislation promoting equity.

Hunter et al. (2000) argue that more covert forms of discrimination exist in the labour market. Jenkins (1986) defines indirect (or covert) discrimination as "treatment that is nominally equal in its effects [and] imposes conditions or requirements that can be less easily met by a particular group and as a result members of that group suffer a detriment" (p.3). An example of such practice would be requiring English literacy for an unskilled manual job, educational

qualifications, work experience, personality or "fit" of person to the culture of the organisation, or "your own vehicle" for an office-bound position.

## 1.5. Growth in private recruitment

Between 1982 and 1993 the number of private recruitment agencies doubled (Central Statistical Services, 1988; Central Statistical Services, 1997; Department of Manpower, 1987). Since then no further studies have been conducted into the private recruitment industry and statistics are therefore unavailable. Anecdotal evidence obtained from interviews with private recruitment consultants and APSO (a voluntary organisation for private recruitment agencies in South Africa) suggests a growth in the number of agencies over the last decade. APSO[1] report an additional 104 new members in the last year, which has pushed their membership to over 500. This growth can be understood as a response to the changes in labour legislation. Furthermore the out-sourcing of non-core aspects of business, such as recruitment and selection of staff has potentially allowed for the privatisation of racism.

## 1.6. Conclusion

"Systematic inequalities and unfair discrimination remain deeply embedded in social structures, practices and attitudes" are noted in the preamble to the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, 2000. A number of authors argue that legislation is limited in its attempts to combat racism (Jenkins, 1986; Fitzpatrick, 1990; Hunter et al., 2000).

Despite an increasing demand for employment equity candidates there is little support in the available statistics that the demographics of the country are reflected in the employment practices of the private sector. Recruitment, a role increasingly played by private agencies, has been identified as a major barrier to the implementation of employment equity (Deloitte & Touché Human Capital Corporation, 2001:32). 'White' resistance has merely been described, often in terms of 'racial' prejudice. A gap in our understanding of the

---

[1] Personal telephonic communication with Agnes (APSO) on 7th May 2002

reproduction and conservation of historical patterns of employment is hampered by a failure to examine the role of private recruitment agencies.

This research, through examining discursive practice, focuses on the role of private recruitment agencies in "creating informal barriers ... by subscribing to and applying criteria and practices which have the purpose or effect of unjustly excluding persons from particular groups" (Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, 2000: 12).

# 2. Perspectives on studies of 'Race' and Racism in South African Psychology

In reviewing South African social psychological research on 'race' and racism, three strands can be discerned: research that has been preoccupied with measuring and describing 'racial' attitudes; research that has attempted to explain and predict 'racial' attitudes and attitudes towards socio-political change; and discursive research that has focussed on the role of ideology and language in the reproduction of racism.

## 2.1. Historical Overview

Foster's (1991) historical review of South African psychology discerned two strands of 'race' research in the period preceding 1991: ideologically based research that informed segregationist policies and descriptive research that examined 'race' prejudice.

Psychology made an indelible contribution to racist ideology through its claims of 'racial' differences in intelligence. 'Black' people were "found" to be mentally inferior and these findings were used to support 'racial' segregation (Fick, 1929, 1939; van Rensberg, 1938; Willemse, 1942; le Grange, 1962 and Robbertse, 1967 as cited in Foster, 1991). Verwoerd and Willemse, both psychologists, played decisive roles in the political life of South Africa and the construction of apartheid policies.

Research was concentrated in three areas, racial' attitude research, the authoritarian personality and contact hypothesis. A foundation of all three approaches is that 'race' is primarily a problem of prejudice attitudes or ethnocentricism (Foster, 1991: 208). South African attitude research has concerned itself with "intergroup relations, mainly in the form of white attitudes towards black people and in particular the difference between English and Afrikaans speakers in this respect" (Foster and Nel, 1991: 122).

The general pattern of the research evidence prior to 1991 indicates that:

- Attitudes remained consistent over the last sixty years preceding 1991, with English and Afrikaans speaking 'whites' holding negative attitudes towards all 'black' groups.

- In the 1980's there was a swing in attitudes towards a more liberal or tolerant stance, mainly amongst English speaking 'whites'.
- A difference between English and Afrikaans speaking 'whites' attitudes towards 'blacks', with Afrikaans speakers holding more negative attitudes.
- Although little research has been conducted into 'black' attitudes, there is a difference in 'black' and 'white' attitudes towards each other with 'blacks' showing more positive 'racial' attitudes towards other 'race' groups than 'whites'.
- 'Black' attitudes towards 'whites' have been consistent over the last fifty years, with Afrikaans speaking 'whites' being less favoured than English speaking 'whites'.
- 'Whites', especially the English speaking, tended to be catastrophic in their attitudes towards social and political change.

(Foster, 1991; Foster and Nel, 1991)

Foster (1991) highlights the negligible opposition to racism displayed in South African psychology. 'Race' groups were assumed as a given and research contributed to the reproduction of these groups. Prejudice attitudes were described and explained in terms of 'authoritarianism' with limited explanation of context. The "widespread institutional and social nature of racism" (Foster, 1991: 208) was thus ignored and the role of ideology and language in the reproduction of racism remained relatively unexamined prior to 1991.

## 2.2. 'Race' Attitudes

This section reviews how South African psychology had made sense of 'race' and racism in a time of socio-political transformation and resistance to this transformation over the last decade (1991 to date). As identified by Foster (1991), two strands are discernible when reviewing 'race' attitude research, namely descriptive research and explanatory research.

### 2.2.1. Descriptive research

Since 1991 research has focussed on describing South African 'race' attitudes towards other 'races' and towards socio-political transformation. These findings support earlier 'race' attitude research reported in Foster (1991) and Foster et al. (1991) and are reviewed under the following sub-sections:

- Changing 'racial' attitudes

- 'Race' attitudes
- Attitudes towards change

## 2.2.1.1. Changing 'racial' attitudes

A shift in the content of 'racial' attitudes was reported, which required the development of a new measure of anti-black prejudice, namely the Subtle Racism Scale (cf. Duckitt, 1991 and 1993a). This was based on the premise that traditional measures of racism were no longer satisfactory due to rapid socio-political changes. The expression of crudely overt racist beliefs was found to be less socially acceptable amongst 'white' English speakers and the 'white' Afrikaner elite (Duckitt, 1991: 234). This new measure thus avoided the crude stereotypes or derogatory statements of previous 'race' attitude questionnaires and thus reduced the possibility of eliciting resentment and non-cooperation from respondents (Duckitt, 1991 and 1993a).

Furthermore a decline in racism and racist attitudes was reported in research conducted post the 1994 general elections (Braungart and Braungart, 1995; Schlemmer, 2001; Smith and Stones, 1999: 27).

## 2.2.1.2. 'Race' Attitudes

The following "racial" attitude findings were reported for English and Afrikaans speaking 'white' South Africans; a historically well researched group:

- In keeping with previous findings (cf. Foster, 1991; Foster and Nel, 1991) English and Afrikaans speaking 'whites' are not a homogenous group in terms of 'racial' attitudes (cf. Schlemmer, 2001; Smith and Stones, 1999; Stones, Heaven, and Bester, 1997).
- A decline in anti-black prejudice amongst 'white' English speaking South Africans who are reported as more tolerant of other 'race' groups than their Afrikaans-speaking counterparts (cf. Duckitt, 1991 and 1993a; Duckitt and Farre, 1994; Smith and Stones, 1999; Stones, et al., 1997).
- Very little change in 'racial' attitudes amongst 'white' Afrikaners pre and post the 1994 general elections (Stones et al., 1997).

In terms of researching the 'racial' attitudes of 'black' South Africans, the research indicates that:

- 'Blacks' are more tolerant towards other 'race' groups (Duckitt and Mphuthing, 1998; Durrheim and Foster, 1997; Smith and Stones, 1999). This is in keeping with results reported in Foster's (1991) historical review.

- 'Blacks' evaluated and held more negative attitudes towards Afrikaans speaking 'whites' than English speaking 'whites' before and after the 1994 elections (Duckitt and Mphuthing, 1998). This finding is in keeping with research conducted prior to 1991 (cf. Foster, 1991).

Finally, an increasing number of 'whites', 'coloured' and 'Indians' identify themselves as experiencing 'racial' discrimination and view employment equity as an instrument of 'race' discrimination (Deloitte & Touché Human Capital Corporation, unpublished; Schlemmer, 2001: 6). This points to the contested nature of defining racism and will be discussed in more detail further on.

## 2.2.1.3. Attitudes towards change

In reviewing research for the last decade, contradictory findings in terms of attitudes towards socio-political transformation are found. Braungart and Braungart's (1995) study supported the idea that 'black' and 'white' university students' were committed to socio-political change despite concerns about violence and economic problems. 'Blacks' were reported as holding more positive attitudes towards social change, with 'whites' showing the highest levels of dissatisfaction and resistance (Deloitte & Touché Human Capital Corporation, unpublished; Finchilescu and Dawes, 1998; Smith and Stones, 1999; Stones et al., 1997).

Racial attitudes (using the Subtle Racism Scale) were found to correlate with attitudes to change amongst 'white' South Africans. Thus high measures of subtle racism correlate with negative attitudes towards social change, with 'white' Afrikaners displaying the least positive attitudes towards social change (Smith and Stones, 1999).

## 2.2.2. Explanatory research

South African social psychologists have been pre-occupied with "measuring and documenting 'racial' attitudes and their change over time" (Duckitt and Foster, 1991: 199). In response to Foster's (1991) critique they have drawn on individual and social theoretical frameworks to explain and predict changing 'racial' attitudes amongst South Africans and the nature of 'racial' prejudice.

### 2.2.2.1. Changing 'racial' attitudes

South African social psychologists have explained the change in 'racial' attitudes towards a more 'tolerant' viewpoint as a response to socio-political transformation and in terms of realistic conflict theory.

Duckitt (1991) explained the impact of social transformation on 'racial' attitudes in terms of symbolic racism and used this to provide a rationale for the development of a new measure of anti-black prejudice in South Africa, namely the Subtle Racism Scale.

His research was based on South African and international findings that suggested a decline in anti-black prejudice using traditional measures of racism (cf. Hofmeyer, 1990 as cited in Foster, 1991 and Mynhardt, 1980; Heaven and Groenewald, 1977; Niewoudt and Nel, 1975 as cited in Duckitt, 1991 for South African research findings and Kinder and Sears, 1981 and McConahay and Hough, 1976 as cited in Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton, and Radley, 1988; Duckitt, 1991, 1993a and Barker, 1981; Lea, Bokhorst, and Colenso, 1995 for international research findings).

International researchers argued that a 'new', 'modern', 'symbolic' or 'subtle' racism exists as distinct from 'traditional' racism (Sears, 1988). Modern racists were viewed as "unlikely to hold attitudes which outrightly demean black people as being racially inferior" (Billig et al., 1988: 106). Rather the subtle racist justified their opposition to 'black' advancement in non-racial terms. However, "white resistance to social policies such as affirmative action is rooted in prejudice attitudes towards black people, and represents a more sophisticated form of racism than traditional or red-necked racism" (Lea, et al., 1995: 224). Thus the content of 'racial' attitudes was described as changing due to socio-political transformation and new

measures were developed that would adequately reflect these underlying and subtler racist attitudes.

The idea of two empirically distinct constructs – subtle and traditional racism - was challenged by Lea et al. (1995) who queried whether a 'new' form of racism had actually evolved. Both traditional and subtle racism measures were found to be reliable measures of racism amongst 'white' South Africans. However, subtle racism was considered a better measure of political orientation than the traditional measure. The negative correlation found by Lea et al. between traditional and subtle racism suggests that traditional racism has not been replaced, but rather co-exists with it.

Duckitt (1992) also explained the shift in 'racial' attitudes of 'white' South Africans in terms of realistic conflict theory. Realistic Conflict Theory suggests that animosity between groups is functional for the in-group and serves to mobilise it against real or perceived threat. Thus the conciliatory response on the part of 'whites' in the early 1990s was functional. Denigration and open hostility was dangerous to the in-group ('whites') who were negotiating with the 'black' majority (Duckitt, 1992). However, this surface tolerance conceals underlying resentments on the part of 'whites'. Attitude researchers argued that 'race' attitudes have not really changed. Rather respondents were more "sophisticated" and required more subtle instruments to measure their "covert expressions of racial prejudice" (Duckitt, 1991: 234). The need for more sophisticated tools was because of qualitative changes in racism, in which the underlying motive remained racist but the expression was couched.

### 2.2.2.2. 'Race' Attitudes

Both individual and social explanations have been offered to explain 'race' attitudes during socio-political transformation. Psychological explanation of 'racial' prejudice can be found in research conducted by Duckitt (1991; 1993a, 1993b, 1994; Duckitt and Farre, 1994). In this research authoritarianism was conceptualised as a "personality dimension that reflects the generalized tendency towards ethnocentricism and prejudice" (Adorno et al., 1950 as cited in Duckitt, 1993b: 566).

Researchers explained prejudice in terms of ethnocentricism rather than in terms of personality traits; a more social / group understanding. Attempts to predict and understand the construction of ethnic / social identity during socio-political transition and the impact this has on 'racial' attitudes have been offered by a number of South African researchers since 1991 (cf. Bornman and Appelgryn, 1999; Duckitt and Mphuthing, 1998; Gibson and Gouws, 1998; Sennett and Foster, 1996).

Ethnocentricism refers to the preference of one's own ethnic group (in-group) over other "out-groups". The social identity theory approach, as exemplified in the work of Tajfel and later Turner, has explained this categorisation into groups as 'natural'. These social stereotypes are "shared and widely held views of larger groups in society" (Foster and Nel, 1991: 136). People 'need' to order, systematise and simplify information in order to understand the complex world in which they live. Categorisation is thus inevitable, natural and reflects 'real' differences that exist (cf. Durrheim and Dixon, 2001b for details on how this argument is used in lay explanations that justify the conservation of segregation). The large scale diffusion of these negative stereotypical images serves to protect the value system that underlie the division of the social world into certain categories, justify domination and maintain group based ideology (Foster and Nel: 136). Social identity theory argues that people carry these biased images and groupings around with them and reproduce them on demand.

Bornman and Appelgryn (1999) investigated ethnic identity within the context of socio-political change amongst Afrikaans speaking 'whites', English speaking 'whites' and 'black' people. Their findings suggest that a correlation exists between stronger ethnic identification and more negative out-group attitudes and / or behaviour in all three groups.

These findings were supported by Sennett and Foster's (1996) comparative study of 'white' English speaking students in 1975 and 1994. 'White' English speaking South Africans have historically shown little group identification in comparison to 'white' Afrikaans speaking people. Their findings indicate a stronger attachment to their own ethnic group in 1994, than previously reported. Similar studies indicate that stronger attachment to an ethnic group (in-group) occurs at the expense of the out-group, which results in increased hostility (and prejudiced behaviour) towards the out-group. These findings are viewed as confirming social

identity theory, which argues that strength of in-group identity is important in inter-group dynamics.

Duckitt and Mphuthing (1998) explain the high levels of 'black' African group identity and negative attitudes and evaluation of 'blacks' towards Afrikaans speaking 'whites' in terms of perceived threat. They suggest that their findings lend support to realistic conflict theory, which argues that inter-group competition between 'race' groups that involves a perception of threat of the out-group to the in-group, leads to increased ethnocentricism.

2.2.2.3. Attitudes to change

Since the early 1990s researchers have been pre-occupied with predicting and explaining attitudes towards socio-political transformation as South Africa shifted from a minority ruled government to a political democracy.

The Right Wing Authoritarianism Scale was used to predict the response of South African 'whites' to the future majority rule government during this time of political transition (Duckitt and Farre, 1994). The findings indicate a correlation between right-wing authoritarianism (a personality trait) and anti-'black' prejudice, which is negatively associated with support for political tolerance. This correlation between right-wing authoritarianism and anti-black prejudice is in keeping with previous findings (Duckitt, 1991, 1993a, 1993[b], 1994) and indicates that authoritarianism is an "important correlate of prejudice in South Africa" (Duckitt, 1994: 139). Furthermore Duckitt (1994) argues that these findings suggest that conformity to social pressure is not important in predicting and thus explaining 'racial' attitudes.

Change of status of groups and population group membership were considered the most powerful influences on adolescents' socio-political orientation towards the South African situation (Finchilescu and Dawes, 1998). Groups that were formerly the most oppressed under apartheid tended to view the current dispensation in more positive terms, whereas 'white' adolescents expressed high levels of dissatisfaction towards the new democratic government, historically a privileged 'race' group in South African society. Finchilescu and Dawes (1998) explain these socio-political orientations in terms of fear and anger due to perceived loss of privilege by 'coloured', 'Indian' and 'white' groups and resentment caused

by unmet expectations on the part of 'blacks'. There is a concern that a rise of racism amongst 'whites' will result in a "racial and ideological divides [that] continue through to the present" (Finchilescu and Dawes: 579).

The development of a national identity is considered essential for democracy (Gibson and Gouws. 1998; Heaven, Stone, Simbayi, and Le Roux, 2000). However, findings reported by Gibson and Gouws (1998) indicate high levels of political intolerance still exist amongst all population groups in South Africa. Their findings indicate that strong in group identification (in terms of language, 'race' and ethnicity) results in higher levels of group antipathy, the perception of others as more threatening and a decrease in tolerance. This is most true of 'white' South Africans, however "the deleterious effects of group identification are not confined to any single segment of the South African population" (Gibson and Gouws: 19). It would appear that the formation of strong group identities does not contribute to lower levels of antipathy, threat or intolerance towards the 'racial' other. Therefore the development of a new South African identity may not result in an increase in tolerance, as was hoped, but less tolerance of other 'races'.

The ethnocentric approach argues that strong in-group identity results in an increase in negative attitudes, behaviours and an increasing intolerance towards out-groups. This is problematic as South Africans attempt to negotiate a new national identity and engage with the new legislation that forbids intolerance and racism.

### 2.2.3. The problem with attitudes

The problem with attitude research is that it:

- Treats 'race' as a given
- Defines racism without examining the assumptions made
- Assumes that individuals responses reflect consistent internal mental states
- Adopts a methodology of counting and coding that obscures variation

2.2.3.1. 'Race' as a given

In attitudinal research, 'race' is treated as a given. Researchers make extensive use of 'racial' categories in the reporting of findings (cf. Bornman and Appelgryn, 1999; Duckitt, 1988;

1991; 1992; 1993a & b; Duckitt and Farre, 1994; Duckitt and Mphuthing, 1998; Heaven et al., 2000; Schlemmer, 2001; Sennett and Foster, 1994; Smith and Stones, 1999; Stones et al., 1997). These 'racial' categories are assumed as 'natural' and their validity is seldom questioned in the research. They assume that a single and accurate representation of the world is possible. Stereotypes and 'racial' categories are presented as potentially neutral cognitive rather than socially meaningful aspects of discourse (Condor, 1988: 79). In understanding racism in terms of stereotypes or distortions of the information processing mechanism, the content of people's judgements and why particular groups are continuously the target of these premature or over-generalised judgements remains unquestioned (Henriques, 1984).

Finally, modern theories of genetics provide no support for the notion of 'race' in terms of underlying physical and genetic differences (Appiah, 1992 as cited in HRC, 2000: 53 and Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 44). Rather 'race' is a social construct that structures both how we talk about our world and in turn construct it. This failure to treat 'racial' categories as problematic and social constructs, results in the perpetuation of the notion of different 'races'. Attitude researchers thus entrench rather than dissolve the discourse of racism. They participate in the reproduction of racism (Condor, 1988; Foster, 1991; Foster and Nel, 1991).

2.2.3.2. Defining racism

The politics of defining racism is not outside the ambit of 'race' attitude research. Racism is constructed in a particular manner as is evidenced in Schlemmer's (2001) work. Schlemmer (2001) constructs two types of racism, namely "racism of a core kind" that refers to blatant affronts or insults experienced by individuals and "institutional racism" that refers "structures, rules, regulations, and procedures that, while not overtly aimed at race discrimination, have the effect of specifically discriminating against members of a particular race group" (p. 12). Schlemmer (2001) uses participants' inability to cite examples of what he has defined as "racism of a core kind" as proof that racism no longer exists. This argument fails to take cognisance of the 'subtle' racism research, which indicates that blatant affronts or insults are unlikely to feature in modern 'race' talk (Barker, 1981; Billig et al., 1988; Goldberg, 1998; Kinder and Sears, 1981 and McConahay and Hough, 1976 as cited in Lea et al., 1995).

An attempt to define racism in terms of content, as many attitude researchers do (cf. Duckitt, 1991 and 1993a; Schlemmer, 2001), is problematic due to documented changes in 'race' talk. In operationalising 'race' attitude research, researchers fail to examine and unpack their assumptions about the nature of racism, i.e. what they bring to the research. I will argue that it is more useful to look at the effects rather than the content of talk in trying to define and understand racism; that is by considering racism as a field of discourse (Goldberg, 1990: 296).

Furthermore attitude researchers do not explicate the contextual nature of items in an attitude questionnaire. For example the following item taken from the Subtle Racism Scale (Duckitt, 1991) reads: "If all races were permitted to mix freely they would probably live in peace". In the 1980s and early 1990s, a time of political violence and social upheaval, peace was very much on the political agenda and the item cited reflects the issue of the day. Today, such an item might read "It is natural that people prefer to mix with their own group" (cf. Durrheim and Dixon, 2001b). Although attitude scales acknowledge a change in 'racial' attitudes, they fail to explicate and account for social change in attitudes but rather describe this new and subtle 'racial' attitude.

2.2.3.3. Assumptions about attitudes

Attitudinal research assumes that responses on attitude questionnaires and surveys are enduring, consistent mental states that are located within individuals and can be measured. This explanation locates the problem of racism within the individual. Individuals are therefore the sites of intervention. Such explanations fail to account for the socio-historical (re)production of racism.

Attitude research ignores the complex linguistic acts people engage in whilst responding to questionnaires. The value placed on consistency in behaviour is implicit in the set up of the questionnaire. The response format of the Subtle Racism Scale (Duckitt, 1991, 1993a) precludes ambivalence; a single response from a limited range of options (set up by the researcher) is required. The respondents are therefore unable to mark both "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree" in responding to an item on the Subtle Racism Scale, for example: "If all races were permitted to mix freely they would probably live in peace" (Duckitt, 1991).

The variations that do appear in attitude research are treated as "obstacles to the production of reliable research findings ... [and not as] theoretically interesting indications of the way people deploy language" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 40). Variability is explained in terms of distorted social perceptions; an attempt to manage the impression others have of the speaker: or as out of the ordinary (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Issues of variability are resolved by claiming that one of the contrary themes possesses deeper psychological significance than the other. The Subtle Racism Scale was developed in response to purportedly contrary themes that emerged in measuring 'anti-black' prejudice. The assumption was that more sophisticated measures were required to get at the "covert" racist attitude rather than the socially desirable expressed attitude (Duckitt, 1991). Little attempt was made to understand or explicate this ambivalence. Rather it was assumed that the 'real' racist attitude could be uncovered and measured. Such accounts fail to grasp the flexible, contradictory and inconsistent nature of 'race' talk (Potter and Wetherell, 1988: 52).

2.2.3.4. Methodology of attitude research

Attitude surveys and questionnaires (cf. Duckitt, 1991 and 1993b; Schlemmer, 2001) tend to resort to counting and coding of data. Participants' verbal responses are 'converted' to statistics. Counting and coding is thus another method of resolving variability by obscuring variation and overestimating homogeneity. The survey reported by Schlemmer (2001) provides us with an opportunity to examine how counting and coding obscures variability. This survey utilised open-ended questions rather than a single-response attitude questionnaire such as the Subtle Racism Scale. The analysis involved the coding and generation of categories / themes, which were imposed over the data. The categorisation of responses using content analysis was unable to deal with the "subtlety of a situation where participants may be constructively using their language to produce different sorts of effects" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 41).

Explanatory accounts by attitudinal researchers have looked at the impact of various variables (ethnic/social identity, authoritarianism, political transformation) on 'racial' attitudes. These accounts have attempted to establish a correlation between a given variable and 'racial' attitudes. Although useful, they fall short of explaining the origin of such group arrangements; a task that discursive psychology tackles in its examination of language and ideology.

## 2.3. The Discursive Turn

Discursive research places ideology and language in direct focus. Attitudes are not merely things in individual's heads but are evaluative practices that exist and are (re)produced in discourse (Potter, 1998). Through detailed analyses of talk and text, South African discursive researchers further our understanding of how racism continues to be reproduced in a socio-political context that forbids it. The current research locates itself within the discursive field and has drawn on the analysis and findings of South African (and international) researchers to guide examination of private recruitment consultant's talk and text. South African discursive analysis has focussed on:

- The (re)production of 'racial' categories
- Shifting talk on 'race'
- The denial of racism

in attempting to understand 'racialised' discourse during South Africa's socio-political transformation.

### 2.3.1 The (re)production of 'racial' categories

In the last decade discursive researchers have examined the (re)production of 'racial' categories. Stevens (1998) examined the perception of 'racial' threat from 'black' Africans amongst 'coloured' adults in the Western Cape. The use of 'racial' categories reflects the construction and acceptance of the legitimacy of these 'racial' boundaries and the "internalisation of the dominant racist ideology" (Stevens, 1998:208). The 'African' other ('their', 'them', 'they') is constructed as distinct from the 'self' ('us', 'we') as members of a 'coloured' social category. The 'African other' is constructed as a physical and socio-political threat to 'coloureds', particularly as it pertains to employment. Thus respondents did not view employment equity as "inclusive of themselves, but rather as one that marginalises them" (Stevens: 208). Furthermore the appointment of 'Africans' was viewed as "token appointments" that reinforces the stereotype of 'Africans' as incompetent and negating the equality of 'Africans' at an intellectual level. It functions to marginalise 'African' competitors in the labour market and preserve access to economic resources. The 'racialised' discourse of 'coloured' adults reflects and contributes to the perpetuation of racist ideology.

Duncan (1996) and Stevens (1998) have examined the stereotypical construction of 'black' during the 1990s. 'Blacks' are constructed as prone to committing acts of violence (Duncan, 1996 and Stevens, 1998: 209), untrustworthy, as non or sub-human, racist, child-like and unreasonable (Duncan, 1996). These constructions are used to justify the treatment of 'blacks' and reinforce the need to maintain 'white' domination. These stereotypical and denigratory constructions of 'black' position the 'racial' other as responsible for their current position and function to justify and legitimise the maintenance of the historical status quo.

The use of "racial" categories by speakers is thus assumed to reflect real differences between 'black', 'coloured', 'Indian' and 'white' South Africans and to justify the position of the 'racial' other in society. Lea (1996) identified two primary discourses used by 'white' English speaking South Africans to accomplish positions of non-racism whilst drawing on racist premises and principles, namely biologism and cognitivism. The discourse of biologism argues that 'race' is biologically determined. Speakers construct 'racial' differences as 'natural' and these differences can be ascertained by appraising the external reality (Lea, 1996: 186). The discourse of cognitivism is based on the assumption that these social categories reflect actual similarities and differences between people (p.187). In Lea's study prejudice is viewed as inevitable and categories are therefore a necessary evil as they provide order. These categories are neutral and beneficial in terms of developing and maintaining in-group identity. The 'ordinary' racist is constructed as 'just' ethnocentric (preferring their own 'race' group) and not discriminatory. In this way participants are able to position themselves as non-racist whilst reproducing 'racial' categories and racism.

'White' South African holidaymakers justify segregation and criticise social transformation "by arguments that employ theories of cultural processes to depict segregation as a universal, natural phenomenon; a simple fact of life" (Durrheim and Dixon, 2001a: 15). Racism is based on 'reasoned' arguments, drawing on popular social science theories that posit 'natural segregation'. The division of society into groups and the privileges afforded due to group membership is explained as natural and not in 'racial' terms. This argument functions ideologically to defend segregation and criticise transformation in South Africa.

South African discursive psychology has explicated how during this time of socio-political transformation, 'racial' categories have been constructed as 'natural' and inevitable and have

elucidated how this has contributed to the reproduction of 'racial' categories and racism, despite racism being illegal.

## 2.3.2 Shifting talk on 'race'

South African discursive researchers have highlighted how the construction of the 'racial' other often draws on arguments and terminology that avoids 'racial' categorisation (cf. Dixon, Foster, Durrheim, and Wilbraham, 1994; Durrheim and Dixon, 2001b; Stevens, 1998).

Durrheim and Dixon (2001b examine "the rhetoric of 'racial' exclusion as applied to South Africa's beaches" (p.433). The beaches are constructed as the domain of 'the family'. The shifting ways of talking about and preserving this 'white' family space is elucidated. In the 1980s, a time of intensified political struggle, 'black' political protest was constructed as a foreign activity for the beaches; not something families do. Beaches were constructed as private places that "should be free of the politics of public life" (p. 444). In the 1990s beaches were no longer sites of political struggle but 'black' beachgoers presence was constructed as a transgression due to their 'manners' and behaviour. Place was therefore constructed in a manner that allowed for 'racial' exclusion. Speakers employed a number of rhetorical strategies to position themselves as non-racist. Racism was therefore projected onto requirements for the place, thus allowing racist practice to masquerade as other requirements. This study highlighted the shifting content of 'race' talk in South Africa, whilst speakers attempt to justify and maintain exclusionary 'racial' practice.

In a similar investigation of place, the Hout Bay residents' construct the 'black' 'squatter' community as violating this space (Dixon, et al., 1994). The use of ecological arguments supports the racist division of space without drawing on 'race'. Stevens (1998) also highlighted how terms such as 'ethnic differences', differences in 'culture' (cf. Durrheim and Dixon, 2001b; van Dijk, Ting-Toomey, Smitherman, and Troutman, 1997) and 'nations' are used euphemistically for the concept of 'race' in South Africa. By avoiding the use of 'racial' categories speakers are able to distance themselves from 'racial' issues and potential accusations of racism whilst engaging in racist rhetoric that justifies the conservation of 'racial' privilege.

## 2.3.3 The denial of racism

Modern racism is characterised and disguised by denial (cf. Billig, et al.; 1988; Sears, 1988; van Dijk, 1992) as everyday practices are more implicit, indirect, subtle and less open although not necessarily less effective or insidious (Durrheim, Quayle, Whitehead, and Kriel, under review).

Barnes, Palmary and Durrheim (2001) argue that speakers draw on a number of rhetorical strategies to convey potentially racist comments, whilst distancing themselves from accusations of racism (p.325). Their investigation highlights the use of humour as a strategy extensively utilised by family, friends and acquaintances to negotiate the 'sensitive' topic of 'race' whilst denying their own role in the reproduction of racism. The speaker's humour invites the complicit laughter of others (Barnes et al., 2001: 327). Humour and laughter create an environment that allows the speaker to engage in racist talk and makes an angry retort on the part of the other socially inappropriate.

Durrheim et al. (under review) examine the rhetorical strategies employed by the South African media to deny racism following the Human Rights Commission investigation into racism in the media. These strategies position the talk and text of the media as "reasonable and justifiable" (Billig et al., 1988; Edwards, 2000). Durrheim et al. (under review) highlight how the political transformation in South Africa has resulted in a dramatic normative shift that embraces the ideals of equality, multi-culturalism and non-racialism. It is thus unacceptable and illegal to express blatant racist stereotypes or argue for segregation or discrimination (Durrheim et al., under review: 6). The following features of the discourse of denials are elucidated:

- splitting racism into 'evil' and morally reprehensible racism that is located externally and in the past and benign forms of racism.
- relativising and trivialising racism by suggesting that such practices are inevitable, commonplace and universal and by divesting potentially racist practices of 'racial' significance and attributing these practices to non-racial causes (cf. Billig, 1991 and Sears, 1988 on symbolic racism).

Durrheim et al. (under review) argue that the function of denial is to distance the speaker from potential accusations of racism whilst justifying 'racial' difference and perpetuating

negative racist stereotypes. Thus couched within the rhetoric of transformation is the denial of racism, as speaker's position himself or herself as 'benignly' racist.

## 2.4. Conclusion

The private recruitment industry, the focus of this study, is not exempt from this socio-political transition. Legislation has shifted the way private recruitment agencies go about their daily business (Employment Equity Act, 1998; Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, 2000). This research attempts to elucidate how recruitment consultants and their clients make sense of these changes by focussing on employment equity.

The attitudinal approach does not adequately explicate the anticipated ambivalence in private recruitment consultants talk and explain resistance to socio-political transformation within the industry.

Although South African discursive research has examined the rhetorical strategies employed in the (re)production of 'racial' categories and the construction and use of negative stereotypes of 'black', the construction of 'white' has remained relatively unexamined. One of the aims of this study is therefore to bring the construction of 'white' under the analytic spot light. The analysis will argue how the construction of 'white' is a necessary part of justifying the conservation of 'racial' privilege in the current context.

South African discursive research indicates that new discursive practices and new 'languages of legitimation' have emerged during this time of socio-political transition (Dixon et al., 1994). The 'languages of legitimation' that emerged during this period draw on non-racial arguments, such as 'space' and 'culture', to justify and conserve the historical status quo.

Discursive research also acknowledges the shifting nature of 'racial' talk. Thus talk reflects our changing context and audience (cf. Durrheim and Dixon, 2001b). In the current context racism is illegal and discursive researchers have highlighted the variation found in 'race' talk as speakers simultaneously deny racism and engage in racist practice. The current research aims to examine the denial of racism within the private recruitment industry. Examining the denial of racism provides us with an opportunity to understand "the techniques by which

racism is being renegotiated … [and] may lead to an understanding of how racism is subtly transforming itself to find a new lease of life in post-apartheid South Africa" (Durrheim et al., under review: 29).

# 3. Negotiating Talk and Text

"We live our daily social lives within an ambience of conversation, discussion, argumentation, negotiation, criticism and justification: much of it to do with problems of intelligibility and the legitimation of claims to truth" (Shotter, 1993:29)

## 3.1. Introduction

This chapter has three main tasks in arguing for the efficacy of discourse analysis in understanding the reproduction of racism within the recruitment industry. Firstly, it outlines what I mean by discourse analysis and discusses the major analytic concepts required for this method of analysis. Secondly I outline how I gathered the talk and text for this research. Finally the chapter will detail how the talk and text of recruitment consultants was read using the analytic concepts of discourse analysis.

## 3.2. Discourse analysis

Discursive psychology includes a variety of theoretical perspectives; however they agree that an analysis of the function of language and context is of prime importance (Barnes, et al., 2001: 325). This analytic work draws heavily on an approach adopted by Potter and Wetherell (1987, 1988, 1994) and Wetherell and Potter (1988, 1992). My task is to provide an understanding of those aspects of their approach that are relevant to this particular study.

Discourse analysis is a radical shift from traditional social psychology's understanding of language as a "neutral, transparent medium between the social actor and the world" (Wetherell and Potter, 1988: 168). It argues that language is not simply a signpost to some underlying mental states or attitudes, but is constructive and active. This section will position language and the study of discourse at centre stage. It assumes that conversation is at the very heart of social life. We then explore some of the major components of discourse analysis, namely function, construction and variation and argue for how these will assist in analysing the talk and text of private recruitment consultants. Finally we examine Billig et al's (1988) concept of ideological dilemmas and his emphasis on the centrality of rhetoric or argumentation.

This is based on an assumption that we speak with an awareness of challenges to our "claims to truth" (Shotter, 1993: 92) and construct arguments to justify, legitimate and negotiate our positions.

In using discourse analysis I attempt to understand what talk does and critically attend to 'truth' claims communicated by recruitment consultants. The purpose of analysis is not "to see if people really are prejudiced, whether openly or behind camouflage of their talk" (Edwards, 2000:1). Rather, analysis focuses on the content of recruitment consultants talk, its subject matter, and its social rather than linguistic organisation; the action, construction and variability of this talk and the rhetorical organisation of everyday talk and thought (Edwards and Potter, 1992:28 - 29).

### 3.2.1. Social life

"My research is about conversation only in this incidental way, that we can get the actual happenings of on tape and transcribe them more or less, and therefore have something to begin with. *If you can't deal with the actual detail of actual events then you can't have a science of social life.*" (Sacks, 1992, Vol. 2: 26 cited in Silverman, 2000: 149; italics added)

We focus on conversation because it allows us to "deal with the actual detail of actual events" (Silverman, 2000: 149). Through conversations we display our tacit knowledge of the rules of using language and when and how to use them, i.e. our competency. Conversation is therefore about "socially organised interaction" (Heritage and Atkinson, 1984: 1) that is functional. We **do** things with our talk: we make promises, debate, disagree, concur. etc. It is through this talk that we construct "a changing sea of moral enablements and constraints, of privileges and entitlements, and obligations and sanctions" (Shotter, 1993: 39). Once dialogue is initiated, each conversationalist speaks into a space created by the other. The outcome is always uncertain due to the shifting context of moral enablements and constraints. The core analytic objective of conversation analysis is therefore to illuminate how this conduct or practice is accomplished (Pomerantz and Fehr, 1997: 65).

In the analysis that follows I looked for instances where probes, comments and reflections were ignored or taken up; at opening and closing dialogues; at agreement

and disagreement; at attacking and defending, repairs, pauses, etc. as these devices are "potentially there for a purpose" (Sacks as cited in Potter and Wetherell, 1994: 58). Through close attention to the detail of talk of recruitment consultants and me around issues of employment legislation and employment equity, I intend to elucidate the tacit procedures and common-place knowledge out of which social order (in this case the maintenance of certain historical power relations based on 'race') is constituted (Schiffrin, 1988).

To highlight the sociality of conversation and the shifting context I have chosen an example from one of the interviews conducted:

**Extract 3.1**      **Interview 8 Page 5**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | GERALDINE: | [laughing] Okay, alright. And I'm just wandering how this this particular industry, |
| 2 | | because it sounds like it does operate in a very different way has responded to |
| 3 | | employment equity? I'm assuming that you do have some kind of |
| 4 | THERESA: | When you say this industry, do you mean, mean |
| 5 | GERALDINE: | this recruitment |
| 6 | THERESA: | the, the, the level at which I operate as opposed to again the high street agencies? |
| 7 | GERALDINE: | Hmm, mmm. Start with that ja |
| 8 | THERESA: | Um, you know there's a very obviously the employment equity act has has |
| 9 | | generated a huge degree of awareness and placed a huge responsibility |
| 10 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 11 | THERESA: | on people to employment equity plans and to deliver against those |
| 12 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 13 | THERESA: | **And (.) within the market itself I don't ever detect any resistance** |
| 14 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 15 | THERESA: | **to meeting those plans. The only thing I do recognise is (.)** |
| 16 | GERALDINE: | Hmm, mmm |
| 17 | THERESA: | **scale at which I have, of identifying suitably qualified employment equity** |
| 18 | | **candidates.** At that scale those levels of experience don't exist |

In Extract 3.1 the recruitment consultant and I are talking about employment equity. Through turn-taking – I speak, the recruitment consultant speaks - the conversation moves forward. This part of the conversation was initiated by a question I posed around employment equity. I did this by linking the previous talk about this agency being "different" from other agencies (Line 1 – 3) whilst taking the conversation in a new direction that was more in line with the focus of this study. The consultant responds with a turn that indicates their need for clarity and possibly resistance to my attempt to move the conversation forward in a new direction (Line 4). My turn at talk (Line 5) is intended to clarify what information I seek by indicating that it is the specific agency that Theresa works for that I wish her to comment on. However she requires further categories (Line 6) and I respond (Line 7). Through these turns at talk

we both display our tacit knowledge of the rules of language and negotiate how the conversation is to proceed. The consultant then proceeds to answer the initial question posed (Line 9 – 18).

The sequential analysis of recorded data (text) means that we go beyond the single utterance and examine a number of turns-at-talk. What sequential analysis does is locate an utterance within a broader context of talk by examining what precedes and proceeds the utterance. This allows us to develop an understanding of the complexity of talk and the contextual nature thereof. In posing the question: "Why this utterance?" and "Why here?" (Schegloff, 1998; Wetherell, 1998) we gain insight into the speakers' preparedness to move the conversation forward, acquiesce to, or resist the course of action aimed at by an earlier speaker (Heritage and Atkinson, 1984: 6). In Extract 3.1 the speaker's hesitancy in moving the conversation forward could have been understood as a need for clarity regarding the initial question around employment or resistance to the question posed by me. However as the conversation proceeds it is evident that the consultant sought clarity, as from Line 8 – 19 the consultant proceeds in answering my initial question.

Sequential analysis allows us to understand turns of talk in context. If we simply examined the utterance: "And (.) within the market itself I don't ever detect any resistance to meeting those plans" (Extract 3.1, Line 13 and 15) we would assume that the consultant is providing us with a description of a non-racist institution. However in examining further sequences in the conversation this initial analysis could be called into question. The speaker continues with: "The only thing I do recognise is (.) scale at which I have, of identifying suitably qualified employment equity candidates. At that scale those levels of experience don't exist" (Line 15 and 17). This aspect of talk operates as a "**but**"; which qualifies the previous utterance and calls into question their non-racist position. The consultant does this by arguing that "suitably qualified employment equity candidates" with the required "levels of experience" do not exist. This allows them to justify their practice of not placing employment equity candidates whilst positioning them as 'reasonable' and therefore non-racist.

Through sequential analysis and reading for detail we are not only able to provide an argument for the importance of context but also for the action orientation of discourse.

The recruitment consultant is performing particular tasks, namely constructing an argument against employment equity whilst avoiding potential accusations of racism; that is a social action. My role in this conversation is not a neutral one. I am a co-conversationalist and my presence is felt in my back channelling ("hmms") that indicates to the recruitment consultant that I want her to proceed with this particular line of talk and potentially approve of her remarks. Sequential analysis allows us to elucidate speakers' contributions to the conversation and how these are shaped by what is said and done previously. Our utterances are therefore judged and evaluated in the conversation and social relationships thus regulated.

### 3.2.2. Function, Construction and Variation

Discourse analysis concerns itself with text and talk and argues that we accomplish social action with our talk – we "enact, confirm, or challenge … social and political structures and institutions" (van Dijk, 1997: 30). Because we do things with our talk there is a constructive and functional aspect to it that may or may not be clear to all parties. We engage in discourse as individuals and as members of various groups, institutions or cultures. This particular study concerns itself with the ways in which private recruitment consultants and I, in conversation with each other in a time of socio-political transformation, enact and confirm 'race' as it relates to employment. Analysis concerns itself with the functions and effects of our talk and this is revealed, argue Potter and Wetherell (1994), through the study of variation. These three concepts: function, construction and variation, will be discussed in turn as they are key analytic concepts.

3.2.2.1. Function

One of the major assumptions of discourse analysis is that people use language to **do** things – we persuade others, justify our conduct, ask questions, request assistance, etc. At times the function may be easy to identify, for example "I now pronounce you man and wife" clearly indicates to guests at a wedding that the couple are married. However, the function (or purpose) of discourse may be ambiguous. Speakers may have reasons for keeping the nature of their utterances inexplicit (Wetherell and Potter, 1988).

For example in Extract 3.1 the consultant may have a reason for not immediately providing their views on employment equity. They may be uncertain as to how I will respond to their views and will therefore need to establish where I position myself before they provide a response. Particularly as the norms are of tolerance and the promotion of diversity within the work place. Those seen as criticising employment equity do so at the risk of being judged racist. Accusations of racism are to be avoided at all costs.

However, the analysis of function is not a simple matter of categorising pieces of speech. There is nothing intrinsic in the consultants query in Extract 3.1 "When you say this industry, do you mean, mean" to suggest that they are resisting providing their views on employment equity. It is only in reading the context that their resistance is discernible. The above is just one example of the function being performed. Talk is orientated to many different functions, global and specific (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

Wetherell and Potter (1988) argue that the function of talk can be understood along a continuum from interpersonal to ideological. Interpersonal functions define the local discursive context, for example requesting, explaining, justifying, blaming, etc. Whereas there are those discursive functions that serve a wider purpose and have an ideological effect, for example legitimising the power of one group in society (Wetherell and Potter, 1988: 169). At times it may be difficult to specify the broader consequences of discourse. The use of terminology may have subtle effects that are overlooked by speakers. For example in South Africa the terms "employment equity", "affirmative action" and "previously disadvantaged individuals" is taken as referring to 'black' people in the new South Africa. The terms cited, despite the intention behind them to transform South African society, "provide acceptable ways for talking about race" (Durrheim, 2000: 4). When using these terms speakers are not intentionally aware of the consequences of there talk and that they are reproducing 'race' as a category. For discourse analysts it is these unintended consequences that are interesting. Choice of terminology, for example a recruitment consultant using the term "they" rather than "black", can have unintentional consequences that may be overlooked by the speakers. For this reason discourse analysis cannot be an analysis of function, because functions are not readily available for study.

The analysis that follows attempts to illustrate how talk about 'race' and employment equity amongst private recruitment consultants legitimises 'white' and 'black' roles in employment and "conserves" unequal historical employment patterns whilst simultaneously constructing the practices of consultants (and their clients) as reasonable and non-racist.

Shotter (1993) argues that this joint action between speakers has two major features:

- Joint action produces "*unintended* and unpredictable outcomes" (p. 39; italics in original) that generate a situation between participants
- Although the setting is unintended there is an intentional quality to it. Participants are "both immersed 'in' an already *given* situation, but one with a *horizon* to it, that makes it 'open' to their actions" (p.39; italics in original).

There was an intentional quality to the interaction between the private recruitment consultants and myself. Firstly, I interviewed them with specific objectives in mind, and they were aware of the areas to be covered during the interview. Secondly, our 'talk' about employment equity occurred within an ongoing conversation about these issues. However, the outcome of our talk was unintended and unpredictable. Neither of us (the consultant nor I) had any way of knowing what the outcome would be when we spoke about employment equity, 'race' and recruitment.

Discourse analysis is about interpretation and the development of "*hypotheses* about the purposes and consequences of language" (Wetherell and Potter, 1988: 170; italics in original). This means that the analysis that follows is an interpretation and can be contested. Because discourse is orientated to perform different functions, this means that it will be variable: talk and text will shift according to what people are doing with it. Elucidating the function of discourse is the endpoint of analysis and is revealed through the study of variation.

### 3.2.2.2. Construction

Potter (2000) argues for discursive social psychology as constructionist in two senses. Firstly, it takes people as "constructing their worlds through their accounts and descriptions" (p. 235). Secondly, the descriptions and accounts people use "are

*themselves* constructed" (p. 235). We examine how both of these meanings contribute to our understanding of the subject matter of discursive social psychology.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) argue, "people are using their language to *construct* versions of the social world" (p. 33). Reality does not exist out there as already categorised but is constituted "as people talk it, write it, argue it and undermine it" (Potter, 2000: 5). Function involves the construction of versions for a particular purpose. The metaphor of construction is important in discourse analysis. The term construction suggests that accounts are manufactured or built through social interaction between speakers who draw on a variety of pre-existing linguistic resources. This implies that we actively select which linguistic resources to include and which to omit from a wide range of devices and techniques. This active selection allows us to construct "real-seeming versions" (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 95) that appear solid, factual and stable. The third point concerning construction is that discourse is orientated to action and has practical consequences. We deal with the world through discursive versions rather than 'direct' experience (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1988, 1992). Discourse can be seen as constructing our lived reality.

Our descriptions and accounts are fabricated in occasions of talk and text. We do not talk into a vacuum. Our descriptions, accounts, metaphors, words, discursive resources are within an on-going conversation of one kind or another. In practical terms this means that recruitment consultants and I, when conversing about 'employment equity', 'race' and racism, do so with an awareness of an on-going conversation of these issues within South Africa more broadly. Our conversation is therefore constructed not only due to it being the consultant and myself engaging in it (as relative strangers to one another and me in my role of social scientist researcher), but also within a broader historical and legal context that neither of us can ignore and which structures how we talk about issues of 'employment equity', 'race' and racism. That is when we speak about these issues we not only speak with an individual voice but with a collective voice. Therefore when we speak about 'white' or 'black' we do so without having to specify what constitutes 'white' and 'black' in South Africa. Our history has provided us with an understanding of what constitutes 'race' and also how we may or may not talk about 'race'. Bakhtin (1981 as cited in Durrheim, 1997)

calls this *ventriloquation*. In posing the Bakhtinian question: "Who is doing the talking?" the analysis is able to shift beyond the individual / social dualism that has plagued traditional social psychology, to examining the tools of racist rhetoric.

The consultants and I do not necessarily intentionally and consciously reproduce racism in talking about employment equity. The idea of discourse as constructing reality does not mean this is consciously, intentionally or deliberately done on the part of speakers. However in the analysis section I have treated the talk *as if* it was designed to achieve strategic goals (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 93). I have adopted this approach in an attempt to retain clarity in reading the analysis.

### 3.2.2.3. Variation

Function is one of the end-points of discourse analysis and is revealed through the study of variation. Because discourse is orientated to different functions, accounts will be highly variable – different descriptions may be right for different occasions. This model is contrary to the widely held belief amongst psychologists that individual's are coherent and consistent (Wetherell and Potter, 1988: 171). People's accounts are thus more variable than is held by attitudinal researchers. Variation therefore has a crucial role to play in the analysis. It serves as a cue to us that a particular function is being performed in a particular stretch of discourse. By identifying variation we can work towards an understanding of function (Wetherell and Potter, 1988: 171).

We turn to some of the talk and text gathered to illustrate variation in discourse and how this might be used to explicate the function of talk. In Extract 3.2 the consultant and I are talking about employment equity:

**Extract 3.2        Interview 8 Pages 7 and 8**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | THERESA: | and um, but, but one, one is trying to score points and if you were a black female, |
| 2 | | with a disability and preferably with a prison term for political offences [laughs] (.) |
| 3 | | um and it then moves down the scale. And if you are looking at the Asian market |
| 4 | | there are plenty of really really good CA's |
| 5 | GERALDINE: | It's almost like the way clients have constructed employment equity is a rating |
| 6 | | system with like you were saying, first prize is woman, black, a political prison |
| 7 | | sentence, that kind of thing |
| 8 | THERESA: | Hmm |

| 9 | GERALDINE: | and as you move down the scale so you basically will be scoring less and less |
| 10 | | points |
| 11 | THERESA: | I am not sure whether the the um evaluators of people's employment equity have |
| 12 | | some kind of scoring system but as I understand it, **the process is to work** |
| 13 | | **towards a balance which will ultimately be consistent with the demographics** |
| 14 | | **of this country** |
| 15 | GERALDINE: | Ja |
| 16 | THERESA: | **So, that tells me that you are going to have to have your staff, your work force** |
| 17 | | **is going to be black and three quarters of your management is going to be** |
| 18 | | **black** |
| 19 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 20 | THERESA: | And so on. Um, it doesn't say exactly where they should fit into the organisation. |
| 21 | | It doesn't say that you have to employ a black MD. |

The variation in construction of employment equity in Extract 3.2 occurs across a number of turns at talk. The initial view outlined in Lines 1 – 3 is that achieving employment equity is about "scoring points". The consultant draws on a number of criteria, some included in the Employment Equity Act of 1998 such as 'race', gender and disability, and some not: "with a prison term for political offences". In Lines 11 – 15 the speaker constructs an alternative view of employment equity as working "towards a balance which will ultimately be consistent with the demographics of this country" (Line 11 – 12). This variation in accounts of employment equity signals to us that different functions are being performed. In the first construction (Line 1 – 3) the consultant is dismissive of employment equity through their inclusion of "political prison sentence" in the criteria. They parody the Act and are appealing to an unspoken norm that business does not wish to employ criminals. My response to the consultant's vague and potentially offensive construction of employment equity (Line 1 – 4) makes explicit their account of a rating system (Line 5 – 7 and 9). My explicit account of this "scoring system" may have signalled to the consultant potential criticism of their construction. They were able to maintain their membership of the non-racist community when their comments were vague and unchallenged. However, the explicit nature of my reply signalled a challenge that needed to be responded to. In attempting to avoid this (and potential allegations of racism) they proceed to construct employment equity in a manner more consistent with that held by government (as outlined in the Employment Equity Act of 1998). In examining variation in talk we are able to elucidate the function of talk: the denial of racism, whilst making racist comments.

### 3.2.3. Rhetoric

The analysis draws extensively on the concepts of "ideological dilemmas" and "rhetoric" taken from the work of Billig et al. (1988). One of the reasons the analysis utilises rhetorical theory is because it directs attention to the way particular versions or arguments are designed to undermine competing alternatives.

Billig et al. (1988) argue that ideology is not simply "reproduced as a closed system" (p. 6) that informs how individuals should think, feel and react. Individuals are not simply the "blind bearers of a received ideological tradition' (Billig et al., 1988: 3). Rather ideology, and commonsense, is viewed as "an incomplete set of contrary themes, which continually give rise to discussion, argumentation and dilemmas" (ibid: 6). We construct arguments in response to specific situations and contexts. The content of these arguments will vary depending on the context. These contrary themes (or conflicting values) contained within ideologies are the necessary preconditions that give rise to these dilemmas.

However, within these arguments, are *common places* (Billig, 1996). Common places concern itself with the contents of arguments and are "common-sense values and notions, which ideally should be shared by speaker and audience alike" (Billig, 1996: 228). These basic themes common to many arguments indicate the social nature of rhetoric. There are two aspects to common places:

- They are common because they represent the useful platitudes, stock phrases, etc. that are used time and again by a particular community at a particular time in history. These 'maxims' give a moral quality to our speech (as cited in Billig, 1996: 229).
- The audience and speakers share these bits of folk wisdom. They are commonly used and commonly held (Billig, 1996) and therefore do not require further argument.

However, common places are also marked by a contrary nature, which make "thought and argument possible" (Billig, 1996: 222). Evidence of contrary themes can be found in our talk. Speakers talk in conflicting and inconsistent ways about the same things and therefore do not hold a single position.

Within South Africa contrary themes exist around 'race' where in the last decade political transition has shifted the balance of political power from the hands of 'white' people to the majority - that is 'black' people. The historical conceptualisation of 'black' held by many 'white' South Africans is now a taboo. Labels of prejudice or racist are to be avoided. Billig et al. (1988) argue that prejudice "denotes the evils of irrationality, which enlightened people should try to eradicate from their thinking" (p. 102). Prejudice is not only an 'error' in our feelings, attitudes or thinking but is accompanied by a moral judgement. Prejudice is wrong and to be condemned. The Enlightenment values of rationality and tolerance are a part of our talk about 'race'. Often it is when we are expressing our most unenlightened views that the notion of prejudice appears (Billig et al., 1988: 101).

In this study the dilemma takes a specific form – how recruitment consultants manage racially based requests by clients without being labelled as racist and thus disqualified (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 97). Billig (1988, 1992, and 1996) argues that we engage in rhetoric (or argumentation) to manage these dilemmas. Rhetoric concerns itself with persuasion. We therefore "speak with an awareness of the possibility of such challenges" (Shotter, 1993: 6) to our claims of knowledge. We construct arguments to undermine competing alternatives that are implicitly or explicitly being put forward to justify our 'truth' claims. Justification and criticism are thus essential features of rhetoric. When we justify a particular case we are rebutting the critics of the case. Rhetoric invites us to focus on the argumentative aspects of discourse. Analysis therefore attempts to elucidate how consultants construct discursive versions to counter real or potential arguments concerning their practices.

A rhetorical device utilised to counter real or potential arguments is the use of disclaimers (Billig, 1988, 1996; van Dijk, 1992). A disclaimer is defined as "a verbal device employed to ward off and defeat in advance doubts and negative typifications which may result from intended conduct" (Hewitt and Stockes, 1975: 3 as cited in Billig, 1996: 269). Billig (1996) prefers the term prolepsis, which is a general argumentative device used to forestall objections (p.269). This rhetorical device attempts to seek common ground with a potentially critical audience. I have assumed that recruitment consultants may perceive me as social scientist researcher as a potentially critical audience (as a university student and because I have chosen to

investigate employment equity) who may make accusations of racism. Recruitment consultants will draw on rhetoric when talking about employment equity, 'race' and racism, "to make particular versions appear credible and difficult to undermine" (Edwards and Potter, 1992: 3) and prevent evaluations of 'racism' or 'racist'. This is defined as accountability by Potter and Wetherell (1994) and refers to speakers constructing their claims / actions in such a manner that they are difficult to undermine and therefore appear as fair, objective or "reasonable". The construction of claims as 'reasonable' is an important concept that is utilised in the analysis.

A further rhetorical device utilised by speakers is in offering reports and descriptions of fact as out-there (van Dijk, 1992) and thus external to themselves. This distancing manoeuvre means that the speaker does not take ownership of racist comments / views and consequentially should not be held accountable for holding this type of construction. Furthermore the external veracity of such reports and descriptions are often difficult to establish. The speaker positions themselves as an "observer of facts and events rather than as a racist bigot" (Barnes et al., 2001: 332). This construction is utilised in denials of racism, rather than making accusations about the 'racial' other.

Variability in thinking and talk is inadequately dealt with by traditional social psychologies approach to attitudes. Discursive social psychology assumes that variability is to be expected and provides us with a way of understanding variation in talk as serving particular functions (Billig et al., 1988; Potter and Wetherell, 1987, 1988, 1994; and Wetherell and Potter, 1988). Rhetoric (as outlined in the work of Billig et al., 1988; and Billig, 1996) is one of the cornerstones of this research. One of the major tasks of the analysis was therefore to examine the arguments put forward by recruitment consultants in legitimising their practice and denying racism.

## 3.3. Gathering talk and Text

This section concerns itself with making explicit the following:

- My role in the research process and the assumptions, beliefs and feelings I brought to this study,
- Ethical considerations in accessing talk and text
- How I gained access, and

- Conversations with recruitment consultants

### 3.3.1. My role in the research process

"Research questions are structured by personal and political interests that need to be explored rather than hidden away" (Bannister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, and Lindall, 1995:9).

As a 'white' South African conducting research in post-apartheid South Africa, it is difficult for me to ignore 'race' and the fact that historically I have been defined as 'white', and have in part define myself in this way. My 'whiteness' allowed me to access the talk of private recruitment consultants in a way that would not have been open to me if I had historically been constructed as 'black', 'Indian' or 'coloured'. I believe that a number of consultants spoke to me in the manner in which they did because of this.

Despite the 1994 elections and legislation that prohibits discrimination, the consultants interviewed, spoke about practices that could be construed as racist. I hope that in engaging in the current study I can contribute to the growing body of anti-racist research in South Africa.

### 3.3.2 Ethical considerations in accessing talk and text

From the outset the 'sensitive' nature of investigating the reproduction of racism in the private recruitment industry was apparent. As Kelly (1999) notes, you know that your topic is sensitive when: you have to negotiate with numerous gatekeepers in order to make contact with participants; participants want to know who you work for; and participants want to know what happens with the results and why you are interested in investigating this topic. A number of consultants indicated that these practices were spoken about within their consultancies but not discussed outside their agencies and within the industry per se. Although I knew that these practices occurred as I had 'temped' for a number of agencies throughout my studies, it was not widely discussed. I was therefore also researching an area of illicit / illegal activity – namely of racist practice whereby recruitment consultants were supplying clients with candidates using 'racial' criteria.

From the outset three principles guided the research and the resolution of ethical dilemmas, namely the principles of autonomy, non-malfeasance and beneficence (Durrheim and Wassenaar, 1999; Emmanuel, Wendler, and Grady, 2000). Each of these will be discussed in turn in terms of how they shaped the research.

An aspect of the principle of autonomy is voluntary and informed consent of participants. This means that participants were free to choose whether they would involve themselves in the study or not, can withdraw at any stage, and have a right to anonymity. Informed consent is premised on potential participants being briefed regarding the nature of the research and the tasks that are expected of them. It is widely acknowledged that racism is denied due to the prevailing norm of tolerance and potential accusations of racism are actively refuted (Billig, 1988; Goldberg, 1998; Potter and Wetherell, 1988; Sears, 1988; van Dijk, 1992; Wetherell and Potter, 1988, 1992). The ethical dilemma was that informed consent entails the full disclosure of the nature of the research. Full disclosure regarding the nature of the topic – the reproduction of racism in the private recruitment industry – might have been viewed as threatening to consultants (and their clients) who would not want to be identified as engaging in illegal activities. I initially doubted that recruitment consultants would be willing to participate if I informed them of my topic.

This universal respect for autonomy often forces researchers to "turn a blind eye toward morally relevant details" (Herrera, 2000: 2). I had to question whether informing consultants about what I was investigating would mean that they would refuse to participate and I would therefore have no research topic. Was I turning a blind eye to racist practice that I knew was taking place and thus performing a disservice to society at large (and to those seeking employment who were powerless to do anything about these practices) by not conducting this research?
Informed consent is a "formidable model of personal autonomy" (Herrera, 2000: 1) that assumes a level playing field with all parties being equal irrespective of who or what they are. In the case of this research, autonomy would assume that the recruitment consultants, clients and candidates are all equal (in terms of power). This is clearly not the case as many job seekers rely on private recruitment agencies to gain access to employment. Despite racism (and the reproduction thereof) being of interest to outside parties, the need to acknowledge the dignity and autonomy of participants

(Durrheim and Wassenaar, 1999:67) meant that the following procedures were adopted in terms of accessing private recruitment agencies and ensuring that the consultants participation was of an informed and voluntary nature:

- In contacting potential participants I informed them that I was a Masters student at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, in the School of Psychology who was required to conduct research and submit a thesis in order to achieve my degree. I indicated that the results of the study would be published in a recognised journal.

- During my initial telephonic contact with recruitment consultants I informed them that I was interested in finding out how the recruitment industry and their clients had responded to the changes in labour legislation since 1994. I indicated that I was particularly interested in hearing their views on employment equity and finding out what their clients had to say about employment equity. I acknowledged that there had been some resistance to the implementation of employment equity on the part of clients and wanted to know how their agency responded to this and whether they spoke about these difficulties. In providing potential participants with an outline of the type of questions that would be asked during the interview, I believed that I was allowing them to make an informed decision regarding their participation. From the outset, potential participants were thus aware of the nature of my research and able to decide whether they wished to be interviewed or not.

- All potential participants were also informed that the interview was face-to-face and was usually 45 – 60 minutes in duration. I requested that the interview be audiotaped, as I required transcribed talk for my data analysis. The consultants would be provided with copies of these transcribed interviews and were informed that should they wish to delete any aspect of the text or for the interview not to be included in the data analysis that this would be done. The consultants were assured that they were free to withdraw from the study at any stage as I realised that this was a 'sensitive' topic and that they exposed themselves to personal risk in agreeing to converse with me.

- During the initial stage, informed consent was obtained telephonically. Thereafter I sent a fax / e-mail to those who had agreed or expressed an interest in participating in the study. This fax / e-mail (see Appendix 1 for an example) provided an overview of what was discussed during the telephonic contact. Prior to the interview I phoned the consultant to confirm their participation in the study and once at the interview re-iterated that they were free to withdraw at any stage. This offer was repeated when a transcribed copy of the interview was sent to the consultant.

The second guiding principle is that of non-malfeasance. This means that the research does not harm the participants and that potential risks are considered. The risk for consultants was that should their identities be exposed, they could be fired by the agencies that might deny knowledge of this racist practice and argue that it was an individual choice to supply clients using 'racial' criteria. Furthermore the agencies and individuals could have legal charges laid against them in terms of the Employment Equity Act, 1998 and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, 2000. It was therefore imperative that anonymity be ensured to reduce the risk to participants. Participants were assured that only information relevant to the study would be included to reduce invasion of privacy and inadvertent disclosure in terms of personal identity, the agency and location. Any reference to personal details, organisation, location or clients was therefore removed when the interview was transcribed. To ensure this anonymity I transcribed the interviews. Finally, the tapes will be destroyed once the research is complete to ensure that the only access to raw data will be to the transcribed interviews.

The final principle that guided the research process is beneficence. Beneficence concerns itself with benefit, if not to the research participants directly, then other researchers and society at large. From the outset I was uncertain as to how developing an understanding of the reproduction of racism would benefit private recruitment consultants. Exposure of consultant's practices would draw attention to the private recruitment industry and potentially result in closer monitoring of client requests that might make it more difficult for them to be made. From the outset the benefit of understanding the reproduction of racism to society at large was more easily

discernible. For in understanding how racism is reproduced we are able to develop strategies to counter racism (Wetherell and Potter, 1992). This study was seen as contributing to a growing body of anti-racist literature in South Africa, a society struggling with issues of 'race' and racism despite legislation that forbids it.

Throughout the research process I have been aware of the sensitive nature of the topic from the responses I received. When I initially presented this research to colleagues the contested and debated nature of this topic informed this opinion and whilst accessing recruitment consultants willing to talk, this was re-iterated time and again. Those recruitment consultants who have chosen to speak to me have done so at great personal risk and I am deeply grateful to them. Every attempt has been made to inform participants regarding the nature of the research and ensures their anonymity, thus maintaining the principles of autonomy, non-malfeasance and beneficence.

### 3.3.3 Accessing talk (and text)

The nine interviewees who participated in this research were recruitment consultants, working within the recruitment industry (permanent or temporary) in two urban areas in South Africa. Their inclusion in the study was driven by their willingness and availability to converse with me around issues of employment equity and their responses (and those of their clients) to changes in labour legislation.

I envisaged speaking to consultants, even if they did not supply me with permission to tape the interview. I realised that not having transcribed interviews made discourse analysis impossible. All participants included in the final analysis have therefore provided informed consent to being interviewed and these interviews being audiotaped and transcribed for research purposes. Transcribed interviews were also required to provide hard evidence of racist practice in a context that continually denies such allegations (van Dijk, 1992). A recent example of the denial of racism can be found in the Human Rights Commission's investigation into racism in the media where many of the parties denied allegations of racism and argued that no "hard evidence" was provided to substantiate these claims (Durrheim et al., under review and HRC, 2000). If this research were to contribute to the growing body of anti-racist South African literature this evidence would need to be provided.

During the initial stages of research I was pre-occupied with identifying instances of racism rather than focussing on the discursive practices and rhetorical manoeuvres consultants engaged in. The shift in the way I conceptualised the research, informed how I approached private recruitment agencies and gained entry. Whereas initially my brief to potential participants was that I was researching the private recruitment industry and the changes within this industry, later I informed them that I was investigating how people (themselves and their clients) spoke about and responded to the changes in labour legislation since 1994. The focus was employment equity and whether consultants had experienced difficulties in terms of clients' responses and how they had negotiated these difficulties. This shift was informed by my growing failure in accessing recruitment consultants willing to talk, and my burgeoning understanding of discursive social psychology. I became more interested in how recruitment consultants talked about employment equity and why it had been so difficult to access people willing to talk about this.

In terms of the sampling techniques adopted, I originally thought to use snow-balling, whereby in interviewing consultants, I would get the names of other people who might be willing to converse with me. However, their unwillingness in certain instances to provide me with the names of people in the industry meant I resorted to a range of sampling techniques.

I therefore accessed recruitment consultants known to me (through personal relationships, family, friends and colleagues). I also compiled a list of recruitment agencies in two urban centres in South Africa from the Yellow Pages (telephone directory of businesses in particular urban centres) and systematically worked my way through the list to establish whether the owner / manager / partner would be prepared to talk to me in a face-to-face interview.

I had not anticipated the high number of refusals to my request nor the degree suspicion on the part of recruitment consultants to conversing with me about issues of employment equity. I telephoned over one hundred private agencies in the Yellow Pages search. In telephoning recruitment agencies located in the Yellow Pages, approximately one in twenty consultants provisionally agreed to speak to me.

Their refusal to converse with me and provide me with the names of potential research participants can be understood in a number of ways. A number of private recruitment agencies indicated that they were too busy to participate in the study, others that employment equity and changes in labour legislation was not a 'problem' for their agency and they therefore had nothing to say about it. Some of the consultants who spoke to me indicated that they felt "disloyal" to the industry or did not wish for the interview to be taped due to the "sensitive" nature of the talk and feared the consequences of admitting to certain practices.

Due to my promise of anonymity to all participants, I transcribed all the interviews. Each took 8 – 12 hours depending on the length of the interview. The transcribing conventions followed were largely based on:

- Expediency as I was transcribing the data myself (to ensure the anonymity of participants).
- The purpose for which these transcripts would be used. Namely, elucidating argumentative patterns / rhetoric, identifying variation and interpretative repertoires and the function of these in talk. However some attention is paid to turn-taking and it was therefore important to capture pauses, overlaps, etc., as these are important features of conversation.
- Making the text easier to follow for those not familiar with systems of transcribing and thereby opening analysis up to public scrutiny.

The following examples illustrate the main transcribing conventions used:

- A double oblique (//) marks the starts of overlap in talk (//).
- Pauses were not timed, but marked with a dot in parentheses – (.)
- Unclear or inaudible hearings are indicated in square brackets – [ ]
- Speech 'errors' and particles (e.g. umm, hmmm) which are not complete / full words are included.
- Emphasis on the part of the speaker has been indicated by underlining – really
- Commas, full stops and question marks have been included to improve the readability of the extracts.
- Any reference to location or other identifying talk is noted by using three x's – XXX

In terms of interpretation of the text, the following conventions have been used to assist readers:

- Aspects of talk that I wish to highlight for interpretative purposes have been indicated by bolding the relevant text – "To find out where it's coming from, because there might actually be **a valid reason. And then it's not illegal.**"

- I have indicated where I have purposively left out parts of the talk by using three dots – "know it does … We'll tell them we're not really allowed to do that."

- Where necessary I have indicated in brackets what preceded the current talk in order to provide the reader with a context for understanding the talk – "And how do you, how would you handle something like that (i.e. a racially based request)?"

### 3.3.4 Conversations with recruitment consultants

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview schedule (see Appendix 2). This schedule was to access consultant's talk around specific topics – namely how conversations with clients went when they requested candidates using 'racial' criteria; employment equity and what changes had occurred in their industry in the last decade and how they spoke about and responded to these changes. The interview schedule allowed the same themes to be addressed across the interviews with consultants. Although the schedule was used to inform the interviews, as new opportunities presented themselves and new insights were gained, so new questions were developed. For example, after the initial interview where the consultant referred to the development of "secret codes" to note 'race', gender and age on job specifications (all of these are considered "unfair discrimination" in the recruitment and selection of candidates), I asked other recruitment consultants about this practice.

The rationale for interviewing private recruitment agencies is that within South Africa there is a growing trend to outsource recruitment to these agencies. These agencies have power in terms of putting candidates forward to clients. They act as gate-keepers in terms of access to employment much like the Witwatersrand Labour Association and the Native Recruiting Corporation mentioned in Chapter One who

controlled access of 'black' people to employment in the mines at the beginning of the 20$^{th}$ Century.

These interviews are social interactions in their own right. As an interviewer, I contributed as much to the conversation as the consultants did. My role was therefore as an animated conversationalist who provided comments, questions and back channel 'mmms' and 'uh huhs' that are characteristic responses of informal talk.

As my understanding of the literature grew and I encountered difficulties gaining access to these settings, so the questions I asked shifted. For example, one of the questions I started to ask is: "Why is it that I have encountered difficulties accessing recruitment consultants and conversing with them around the issue of employment equity?"

In order to maintain the anonymity of the recruitment consultants, who were reluctant to talk to me without this guarantee, I agreed to alter details such as name, agency and location. I chose to refer to my co-conversationalists by using pseudonym first names and have changed the gender of consultants at random. In using this convention, rather than naming the conversationalists in terms of the content of their talk, namely as recruitment consultant and researcher, I may be accused of disattending to the role responsibilities and may be supporting "the assumption that the conversational situation can be considered as a sociologically neutral space" (Billig, 1999: 554).

Below are details of the recruitment consultants who agreed to participate in this study:

Recruitment Consultant 1: Craig
Craig was initially contacted telephonically and a face-to-face interview was conducted in 2000. He is the owner of a small agency (<5 employees) that has been in existence for less than 5 years. He has however worked in the recruitment industry prior to the establishment of this agency. Craig provided me with the names of other recruitment consultants / agencies that might be willing to be interviewed (snow-balling). It was hoped that this method of accessing conversations could be used throughout the research process.

## Recruitment Consultant 2: Patrick

I contacted Patrick telephonically and a face-to-face interview was conducted in 2000. Patrick reported + 10 years experience in the recruitment industry and is currently the owner / manager of a medium sized (5 – 10 employees) recruitment agency. When I requested the names of other recruitment consultants who might be willing to participate in the research he indicated that he did not wish to contaminate the reliability of my research. Patrick reported that all the names he would give me would hold and express similar views to him and he therefore believed that it would not be worth my while to speak to them. Despite my explanation that I was conducting qualitative research and that this was not a concern, he retained his position.

## Recruitment Consultant 3: Hank

Initial contact with Hank was made through a third party. Thereafter I made telephonic contact with Hank and a face-to-face interview was conducted in 2000. This is a medium sized agency (5 – 10 employees) and he (manager) indicated 5 – 10 years experience within the recruitment industry. This interview had to be re-transcribed due to a hard-drive crash.

## Recruitment Consultant 4: Nancy

Initial contact with Nancy was made through a third party. Nancy, in my telephonic contact with her in 2001, indicated her willingness to speak to me and for the interview to be taped. However, at the time of the interview she indicated that as the owner of this small (<5 employees) recruitment agency. it was "dangerous" for the recruitment industry and her agency to discuss these issues with me. She therefore preferred to chat informally and did not consent to audio-taping or note-taking during the interview. Notes were not written up immediately after to this interview as I had another appointment. Although no record of the interview is available, I have included Nancy for two reasons. Firstly her commentary led me to question why I was experiencing difficulty accessing recruitment agencies and to begin to theorise their reluctance to talk about employment equity. Furthermore it led me to question how I was gaining access and examine what I was investigating. The result was a shift in focus from identifying instances of racist practice to attempting to elucidate how recruitment consultants talked about employment equity and 'race' in the new

South Africa.

### Recruitment Consultant 5: Andre

Andre, who owns / manages a small recruitment agency (<5 employees) was referred to me by a third party. The initial interview conducted in 2000 was lost and I therefore re-interviewed Andre in 2002. Andre has been in the recruitment industry for less than 5 years.

### Recruitment Consultant 6: Liz

Liz is one of the partners of a medium sized agency (5 – 10 employees). She agreed to speak to me after telephonic contact with her from the Yellow Pages search. Liz reported over 10 years experience within the recruitment industry, however reported being a partner in the current agency for less than 5 years. A face-to-face interview was conducted with her in 2001.

### Recruitment Consultant 7: Theresa

Theresa is the manager of a small (<5 employees) recruitment agency who reports being in the recruitment industry for < 5 years. She was referred to me by a third party and agreed to speak to me after I made telephonic contact with her. A face-to-face interview was conducted in 2002.

### Recruitment Consultant 8: David

David is the Assistant Manager in a medium sized agency (5 – 10 employees) and reports < 5 years experience in the recruitment industry. His manager, whom I had contacted telephonically in the Yellow Pages search, referred him to me. A face-to-face interview was conducted with David in 2002.

### Recruitment Consultant 9: Sarah

Sarah works for a large recruitment agency (+ 10 employees) and reported < 5 years experience in the recruitment industry performing a number of different functions from recruitment and selection to client liaison. A third party within the same agency referred her to me. A face-to-face interview was conducted with her in 2002.

Most of the consultants were provided with transcribed copies of the interviews (with the exception of Craig and Patrick who indicated that this would not be required) and requested to make alterations or deletions as they saw fit. Only one consultant (Liz) requested any changes to the transcribed data when I included the name of a competing agency, which she wanted removed.

## 3.4. How the text was read

As indicated in Silverman (2000) the reading of the text commences with the transcribing of talk, in this case the audio tapes. The tapes were transcribed in their entirety in order to facilitate the reading of the text and for analysis of sections of talk to be located in the context of preceding and proceeding turns-of-talk. The close and repeated listening to the tapes during the transcription process meant that each subsequent interview was informed by preceding interviews. I commenced data analysis prior to the completion of interviews and this informed the interview process, as I was able to follow-up on certain features of recruitment consultants' talk. Of course this also means that I may have neglected other features of their talk during the interviews.

In order to make the large body of transcript more manageable and to make the job of analysis easier by focussing on relevant issues I initially identified several themes. The establishment of these themes was guided by the following:

- local and international discursive social psychology literature on 'race' and racism;
- my original concern that racism was being reproduced within the recruitment industry;
- my *experience* of interviewing recruitment consultants; and
- my numerous readings of the individual transcripts.

I originally cut and pasted copies of the interviews into broad themes (as outlined above) and annotated these extracts at the time to assist later analysis. Originally I pasted the interviews onto large pieces of paper, however as the analysis progressed and the establishment of themes shifted and changed, I used a word-processing

package. The use of a word-processing package (MS Word) assisted in moving selected text into new and emerging themes, the cross referencing of text and the removal of selected text from analysis. In selecting text I preferred to err on the side of having irrelevant extracts included rather than exclude relevant material.

This was a cyclical process as I shifted between the transcribed text and themes. As my understanding of the themes developed so I returned to the original transcripts in search of instances of relevant material that I had overlooked in my previous readings. Thus themes shifted and changed with each reading. Previous readings and themes became redundant; new avenues were explored and sometimes abandoned and themes merged together.

No step by step process in keeping with quantitative research methodologies can be outlined. In reading the text I discovered that the process of discourse analysis is a dialogue. I dialogued with the literature, my experience of interviewing (or not as the case was), my supervisor and the transcribed talk of recruitment consultants. Throughout this process my reading was guided by the concepts of variation, construction, function and rhetoric (Billig, 1988 and 1996; Potter and Wetherell, 1987, 1988 and 1994).

A central task of discourse analysis is to identify variation (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, 1988, 1994; and Wetherell and Potter, 1988, 1992). Discourse analysis assumes that variation will be present as people do different things with their talk to achieve particular ends. The importance of identifying variation is "because it is a signal that different ways of constructing events, processes or groups are being deployed to achieve different effects" (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 102). Throughout the process I attempted to identify variation within the talk of consultants and between consultants. Once variation had been identified either within the consultants talk or between consultants, I then proceeded with more detailed analysis in an attempt to establish the function of this talk.

This detailed analysis attempted to identify the rhetorical strategies utilised by consultants to legitimise and justify their position. That is recruitment consultants engaged in rhetoric for a purpose (function) albeit possibly unconsciously. By paying

attention to sequential turns-of-talk and how certain phrases or words were used I elucidate how consultants construct their argument and position themselves as non-racist whilst continuing to engage in racist practice. The questions that informed this aspect of analysis were: "Why this utterance?" and "Why here?" (Schegloff, 19; and Wetherell, 1998).

For example in Extract 3.2 the recruitment consultant talks about employment equity provides two conflicting definitions of this practice. The initial definition indicates their resistance to employment equity by including a political prison sentence as one of the criteria (alongside 'race' and gender) that allows the employment equity candidate to score more points. The ludicrousness of this argument assists the consultant in constructing an argument against employment equity. In doing this the consultant leaves themselves open to allegations of racism by me as social scientist researcher and interlocutor. Later on in the conversation the consultant talks about employment equity in more politically correct terms as reflecting the demographics of the country. This understanding of employment equity is very much in keeping with how government has conceptualised it and in this way the consultant aligns herself with government. They are able to counter potential accusations of racism (due to their earlier conceptualisation) by aligning themselves with the government's definition. Why did the consultant make those utterances at that point in the conversation? In the example cited I would argue that the consultant was positioning themselves as on the side of employment equity and non-racism whilst engaging in other practices that reproduce racism.

The purpose of identifying variation and examining the arguments put forward by recruitment consultants is to elucidate some of the functions of their talk – namely the reproduction of racism whilst maintaining the moral high ground of the non-racist (Billig, 1988). I therefore draw on a range of extracts in the analysis section to support the claims made and to provide the reader with an opportunity to evaluate these claims critically. The focus of analysis is on the discursive practices used by recruitment consultants in the reproduction of racism.

## 3.5. Conclusion

Traditional social psychology has engaged in research that assumes language is "neutral" and a pathway to consistent, underlying states. It has failed to theorise the variability contained within talk adequately and the reproduction of racism in anything other than a dualistic manner. Discursive social psychology draws on a number of analytic tools (variation, function, construction and rhetoric) that are useful in elucidating the reproduction of racism. These tools facilitate an understanding of the complexity of talk and text that takes the individual and collective voice of the speaker into account. The analysis that follows is therefore not viewed out of context, but rather is specific to a particular time and place in South African history.

There are disadvantages and advantages in utilising discourse analysis. One of the disadvantages is that discourse analysis requires a lot of effort – in conducting the interviews, transcribing talk to text and the analysis thereof. Furthermore discourse analysis is not suited to the production of empirical laws that are often the goal of social psychological research. Rather, in attending to the talk of recruitment consultants and detailed analysis of their arguments we do justice to the subtlety and complexity of their explanations. The analysis begins with material that is available for public scrutiny and findings are open to evaluation. If we wish to counter racism, the focus on specific linguistic content and the organisation of explanations provides us with an understanding of the techniques used to reproduce racism.

In attending to the both the micro and macro issues of conversation, it is hoped to provide a comprehensive understanding of racist discourse within the private recruitment industry. However, this runs the risk of doing neither well. This research makes no claims to revealing the 'truth', but rather is an attempt to elucidate racist talk within a specific context, namely private recruitment. The position I hold is one of a number of positions that could be held concerning racism and 'race' in South Africa and as such is contested.

# 4. Dialoguing with talk and text

"racist discourse is not ephemeral but powerful in constituting social formations in ways which are oppressive for certain social groups" (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 68)

## 4.1. Introduction

The analysis investigates the reproduction of racist effects in recruitment by studying the discursive practices of private recruitment agencies. South Africa has undergone social and political transformation in the last decade. Political power has transferred from the hands of the 'white' minority rule to a democracy. Whereas previously 'racial' privilege was enshrined in the legislation, within this new democracy racism is illegal. It is assumed that South Africans talk reflects this knowledge (cf. Bakhtin, 1988 concept of ventriloquation). Despite racism being illegal, it persists in our society (cf. Duncan, 1996; Durrheim et al., under review; Durrheim et al., 2001[a]; Finchilescu and Dawes, 1998; Gibson and Gouws, 1998; Human Rights Commission, 2000; Hunter et al., 2000; Lea, 1996; Stevens, 1998). This chapter attempts to elucidate how, during this time in our history, recruitment consultant's talk about 'race', employment equity and reproduce racism.

We commence the analysis by identifying the dilemma recruitment consultants are confronted with, think through and negotiate when clients request candidates using 'racial' criteria. The analysis then shifts to the rhetorical strategies employed by consultants to legitimise and justify their current practice, namely the construction of 'whiteness' and 'blackness'. Implicit in their rhetoric of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' is that of 'racial' hierarchy and privilege and this is used to justify racist practice. A simultaneous rhetorical manoeuvre is that consultants defend themselves against potential accusations of racism and distance themselves from such constructions by others. The analysis will highlight how consultants engage in a number of rhetorical strategies to defend themselves against potential accusations of racism and maintain their position within the "moral community of the unprejudiced" (Billig, 1988:99). We examine some of the strategies consultants employ, namely their denial of racism by splitting racism and defining it as 'unreasonable' or 'reasonable. They distance themselves from 'unreasonably' racist practices by constructing them as 'out-there' and in the past rather than as "reflections of the actor's own desires or concerns" (Edwards and Potter, 1992: 160). The function of denial is therefore to position

consultants as non-racist whilst engaging in racist talk and conserving the historical status quo.

## 4.2. The dilemma

Billig et al. (1988) argue that contrary themes or ideological dilemmas are very much a part of thinking. Recruitment consultants argue and think through these conflicting socially shared beliefs, images, moral values and social knowledge. They engage in dialogue – be it with themselves or with others.

The practice of recruiting and selecting candidates using 'racial' criteria is located in a context where such requests are illegal (in terms of the Constitution of 1993, Employment Equity Act of 1998 and Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act of 2000). Furthermore accusations of racism are actively refuted and rejected as contrary to the spirit of equality and tolerance of post-apartheid South Africa (and globally, cf. Billig, 1988; Durrheim et al., under review; van Dijk, 1992). The dilemma for the consultant is therefore not just that clients make racially based requests but how they can position themselves as non-racist, which is important in the new South Africa, whilst fulfilling these briefs.

### 4.2.1. Identifying the dilemma

Consultants articulate the dilemma of racially based requests in a society where this is illegal in the manner outlined in Extract 4.1. The dilemma is how consultants can position themselves as non-racist whilst fulfilling these requests (cf. Extract 4.2).

| **Extract 4.1** | **Interview 6 Page 13** |
|---|---|
| 1 LIZ: | … Because what they are doing is they are saying, "We want a white person for this |
| 2 | position. Now if we were to run the ads ourselves or do the recruitment ourselves, we **will** |
| 3 | **open ourselves up to problems** |
| 4 GERALDINE: | mm |
| 5 LIZ: | with the public. With the employees out there. That we **could get into trouble** for |
| 6 | focussing on white candidates only. |
| 7 GERALDINE: | [cough] |
| 8 LIZ: | But, if we **give it to an external organisation** to handle our recruitment on our behalf. Um, |
| 9 | we take the risk away from ourselves. We give them the **specifications**. How they deal |
| 10 | with that, how they **get around the issue** is their problem. As long as they are supplying |
| 11 | me at the end with the person I am looking for from the beginning". So yes, a lot of |
| 12 | agencies are doing that, knowingly that they are discriminating. |

| 13 | LIZ: | "But you know we don't want to have the **dirt on our hands** so let's give it to the agency. |
| 14 | | **Whatever they make of it or however they deal with it, it's their problem.**" |
| 15 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 16 | LIZ: | "We get the goods at the end of the day. And we don't get our hands dirty at all." |

**Extract 4.2     Interview 1 Page 14**

| 1 | GERALDINE: | This is the sort of stuff, I wondered earlier if you did inform them (about it being illegal to |
| 2 | | request candidates using racial criteria)? |
| 3 | CRAIG: | Ja, we do, we <u>do</u> inform them that they cannot (.) that they are actually <u>not</u> (.) um (.) **legally** |
| 4 | | <u>right</u> (.) um to request a white or a black or a (.) any specific race or gender. Um (.) It's |
| 5 | | like I said to you earlier. A guy does (.) when he (.) when he said to me he wanted a white |
| 6 | | there was sort of **nervous giggle** <u>before</u> **saying that.** So, **they are very aware** (.) the |
| 7 | | clients are very aware that **they may not <u>do</u> what they are <u>doing</u>.** The problem is we don't |
| 8 | | have (.) like I said to you (.) **we don't have a choice** |
| 9 | GERALDINE: | Mmm, mmm |
| 10 | CRAIG: | in the matter |
| 11 | GERALDINE: | And is it. And is the nervous laughter, because I can imagine there would be nervous |
| 12 | | laughter in |
| 13 | CRAIG: | they |
| 14 | GERALDINE: | in requesting any race or any age or (.) or anything that they |
| 15 | CRAIG: | It's more specifically <u>white</u>. If they are **requesting white.** |
| 16 | GERALDINE: | Okay |

The consultants think through and justify their practices as they are aware of the illegal nature of racially based requests and the potential risks of fulfilling such briefs (Extract 4.1 Line 2 – 6 and Extract 4.2 Line 3 – 4, 6 – 7). Their talk (and those of their clients) reflects their difficulty in discussing these racially based requests in a context that forbids it (Extract 4.2 Line 6 – 8).

As is clearly articulated in Extract 4.1, clients turn to recruitment agencies to "get around the issue" whilst "supplying" them with what they are "looking for from the beginning", namely 'white' candidates. Thus they construct themselves as having to choose whether to fulfil clients' requests or not. A simultaneous construction of "no choice" is also argued for as the position themselves as powerless but to comply with these requests (Extract 4.2).

However, it is not only the client who makes these requests and does not want the "dirt" of racism on their hands, but also the private recruitment agencies that fulfil these requests. The consultants engage in a number of rhetorical manoeuvres to distance themselves from potential accusations of racism. In Extract 4.1 the consultant uses reported direct speech (or thinking) of clients concerning the dilemma of racially based requests (Line 1 – 11, 13 – 15, 16) to distance themselves from potential accusations of racism. It is not them (the recruitment consultant) who thinks or acts in this manner, but the client. The use of reported

direct speech makes the veracity of the consultants claim difficult to counter and assists them in distancing themselves from these requests.

Durrheim (2000) refers to this practice of shifting responsibility for the recruitment and selection of candidates based on 'racial' criteria as the privatisation of racism. Thus commercial institutions, such as private employment agencies, have taken over the role of historical apartheid legislation (Durrheim, 2000: 3). The state no longer actively intervenes in the political, economic, legal and cultural aspects of life to ensure segregation along 'racial' lines (as was the case during the apartheid era). Rather, current legislation aims to counter these historical patterns. However, the historical status quo is conserved "by doing nothing special, nothing beyond being guided by the presumptive laws of the market" (Goldberg, 1998: 17) and personal preference. Racism can therefore be reproduced outside public scrutiny and sanction.

Because recruitment consultants are fulfilling these racially based requests they engage in a number of practical and rhetorical manoeuvres that counter accusations of racism and positions themselves as non-racist.

## 4.2.2. Constructing the dilemma

As has been indicated, private recruitment consultants talk through and present the dilemma in particular ways. These representations are not neutral but perform various functions, namely to position the consultant as powerless and uncomfortable with these requests and therefore at some level as not responsible for the practices they engage in as they respond to them.

**Extract 4.3**      **Interview 9 Page 2**

1 GERALDINE:   And this is what I kind of figured (.) and I'm wondering how (.) how you would handle
2                        that? (racially based requests)
3 DAVID:           Ja (.) well we are kind of **caught between a rock and a hard place** because
4 GERALDINE:   Hmm
5 DAVID:           Because we have a data base of exceptionally good candidates (.)
6 GERALDINE:                                                                                    // Hm, mm
7 DAVID:           (.) but **people** are still somehow reluctant to accept **people** into the formal work place

**Extract 4.4**      **Interview 1 Page 5**

1 CRAIG:           They. This specific client that I am talking about is (.) was (.) is a male. Um and he was a
2                        manager at (.) and it's very **sensitive** because it's actually one of the (.) um [laughs] (.) it's
3                        one of the um (.) unions.

| 4  | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 5  | CRAIG:     | **Which is even worse** |
| 6  | GERALDINE: | Okay, okay |
| 7  | CRAIG:     | And it's even **more sensitive** for them. |
| 8  | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 9  | CRAIG:     | Okay. I won't tell you which one of the unions it is |
| 10 | GERALDINE: | No |
| 11 | CRAIG:     | But it is one of the unions that are looking for this candidate. And he said to me (.) um (.) |
| 12 |            | that (.) that (.) we are wanting a (.) a disabled person. But it **needs** to **sort of to be white** |
| 13 |            | **person**. My (.) my (.) the MD doesn't want an affirmative action candidate here. They |
| 14 |            | want a white person. But they were sort of very (.) aah (.) **uncomfortable** (.) with telling |
| 15 |            | me that. |
| 16 | GERALDINE: | Ja |
| 17 | CRAIG:     | Because the **LRA law states that you cannot discriminate in any way**. So, you're not |
| 18 |            | actually allowed to say, "I want a black person" or "I want a white person". |
| 19 | GERALDINE: | Okay. Alright. And I mean how do you respond to this when (.) when this particular person |
| 20 |            | said this example? |
| 21 | CRAIG:     | I. I have **no choice**. I please the client and he pays me. So I have to do what he **requires**. |
| 22 | GERALDINE: | Uh hmm |
| 23 | CRAIG:     | I have to fit the person as close as possible to his **requirements**. That's what I said to you |
| 24 |            | just now. |

The idea of being "caught between a rock and a hard place" (Extract 4.3) serves as a signal that contrary themes exist that the consultant is required to think through and resolve. On the one hand the request for candidates using 'racial' criteria is constructed as "sensitive" in the new South Africa because of the illegal nature of these requests. This is born out in the consultants (and their clients) hesitancy in discussing these requests – there are many pauses in their turn of talk (Extract 4.4). This hesitancy functions not only as an acknowledgement of the illegal nature of racially based requests but positions the consultant as having difficulty with racially based requests. Thus clients' requests position consultants as "caught between a rock and a hard place" of having to choose how to respond, whilst at the same time having "no choice". Do consultants fulfil these illegal requests and open themselves up to potential accusations of racism or do they refuse to meet the clients' "requirements" and lose their business?

Racially based requests are thus argued for as impossible to manage, yet manage them they must. It is the clients who have placed them in this position and this lays the foundation for their response. They engage in a number of arguments to justify fulfilling clients' requests as discussed below. The function of these arguments is counter potential accusations of racism whilst justifying their current racist practice.

Firstly the consultants construct themselves as "caught between a rock and a hard place" and thus having "no choice" in terms of how they respond to clients. It is the clients, those

nameless "people" (Extract 4.3 Line 7) 'out-there', who place consultants in the difficult position of having to decide how to respond to these requests. Simultaneous arguments of choice can be found alongside the "no choice" argument put forward by the consultants. Firstly, clients are forcing them to choose how to respond to racially based requests (i.e. they have a choice as to whether they meet these illegal requests or not) whilst constructing themselves as really having "no choice" but to meet these "requirements". This functions' to position consultants as powerless and their practice as constrained by clients, namely I would like to do it differently but the client pays me to meet his/her requirements.

In both extracts (4.3 and 4.4), consultants also distance themselves from the practice of fulfilling clients racially based requests by positioning racism as 'out-there' (cf. Edwards and Potter, 1992; van Dijk, 1992). They do this in their construction of clients' requests as a "need" and "requirement" and by recounting a story of a trade union.

Consultants distance themselves from potential accusations of racism by arguing that meeting clients' requests is not about 'race' but about a "need" and "requirement" (Extract 4.4). Variation in the construction of 'race' as relevant and irrelevant can be found. 'Race' is simultaneously constructed as an inherent requirement for the position whilst the consultant rejects 'race' as salient through their use of "sort of be white person". In referring to these racially based requests as "requirements" consultants imbue the request with a neutrality not present in the terms 'race' and 'racism'. The taint of racism is to be avoided in the new South Africa and the term "requirement" allows consultants to do just that. Rather fulfilling these requests is about pleasing the client (i.e. good customer service) and meeting their "requirements". If consultants do not meet clients' requirements then they are providing a poor service and their business would no longer be financially viable. The 'job' of the consultant is therefore not to question but to "fit" the person to the clients' requirements! In distancing themselves from clients' requests they can enter into and engage in racist practice without attributions of racism (Potter, 1996: 150). It is people 'out-there' and not them who are "**somehow** reluctant to accept **people** into the formal work environment" (Extract 4.3). This distancing manoeuvre deflects attention away from their own racist practice in complying with these requests by constructing arguments that their clients "should know better". In telling the story of the trade union, the consultant draws on a common-place understanding of trade unions in South African as orientated to 'black' workers. In citing the union as engaging in such requests, a potentially extreme example as unions have historically

been positioned on the side of 'black' workers, they construct their own practice as unexceptional (cf. Edwards and Potter, 1992: 162 – 163). This story draws attention away from their practices and onto the union.

### 4.2.3. Resolving the dilemma

As has been indicated, consultants engage in a number of rhetorical strategies in resolving the dilemma. Recruitment and selection is based on 'racial' (and gender) criteria that have nothing to do with job performance. Consultants are requested: "a twenty three year old blonde with nice legs" (Extract 4.21 Line 10). This practice may be construed as racist (by me, government and by society). Talk functions not only to align itself to particular viewpoints but also to deny counter viewpoints (Billig, 1996). We look at the practical solutions consultants engage in before turning to elucidate more fully the rhetorical strategies employed to justify their practices and position themselves as non-racist.

One of the private recruitment consultants talked about communicating in code as a practical solution to noting clients racially based requests:

| | **Extract 4.5** | **Interview 1 Page 9 – 10** |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | GERALDINE: | Okay. And you obviously make a note of that? (requests for 'white' candidates) |
| 2 | CRAIG: | Yes |
| 3 | GERALDINE: | Ja |
| 4 | CRAIG: | **You have to. Obviously you've got to be careful** |
| 5 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 6 | CRAIG: | Because if anyone had to come and ever do an **audit**. So (.) Okay you've got to be careful |
| 7 | | about what you write down. |
| 8 | GERALDINE: | So how do you. If somebody was to do an audit. Um. How do you know that this particular |
| 9 | | client or these particular clients were looking for this particular, very specific say candidate? |
| 10 | | I want a black male between the ages of thirty-five and forty five for a particular position. |
| 11 | | How do you know? Or I wanted a white female between the ages of twenty-five and. How |
| 12 | | do you know without letting anybody else? |
| 13 | CRAIG: | **We have codes that we write down |laughs|** |
| 14 | GERALDINE: | Aah. Okay |
| 15 | CRAIG: | [laughs] **Ja, we have codes on our (.) on our specifications** |
| 16 | GERALDINE: | Okay. Alright |
| 17 | CRAIG: | Where it would be a number or it would be a (.) a letter or whatever |
| 18 | GERALDINE: | And that's general practice? |
| 19 | CRAIG: | And everyone knows what it means |
| 20 | GERALDINE: | Aha. And someone outside the industry wouldn't know what it is. Okay, and it would be |
| 21 | | specific to particular consultancies |
| 22 | CRAIG: | Yes |
| 23 | GERALDINE: | So |
| 24 | CRAIG: | Not to any other consultancy but to your organisation |
| 25 | GERALDINE: | To. So XXX would have a different kind of way |
| 26 | CRAIG: | Yes |
| 27 | GERALDINE: | of coding and |

| 28 | CRAIG: | Yes … |
|----|--------|-------|
| 29 | GERALDINE: | … So the same sort of system gets (.) gets used?  Okay and it's obviously particular to that |
| 30 | | Indus, that particular organisation |
| 31 | CRAIG: | Yes. Ja |
| 32 | GERALDINE: | So you wouldn't be able to go in |
| 33 | CRAIG: | I wouldn't be able to go into XXX and know what they were.  No, no.  And vice versa.  But |
| 34 | | within your own organisation (.) you (.) you know you tend to have (.) **It's a requirement** |
| 35 | | **unfortunately**.  You have to have it because you **need** to communicate. |
| 36 | GERALDINE: | Ja |
| 37 | CRAIG: | **But you've got to make sure you communicate in the right way \|laughs\| so that no one** |
| 38 | | **else knows what you're talking about. [laughing]** |

In Extract 4.5 the consultant is discussing how they manage clients' racially based requests. They are aware of the illegal nature of these requests and that they are subject to public scrutiny in the form of audits.  Such audits have the potential of exposing recruitment agencies practice of recruiting in terms of illegal requirements and open them up to potential accusations of racism and the ensuing consequences thereof.  In order to not subject themselves to additional public scrutiny and condemnation, consultants therefore communicate in code.  In this way they note illegal requests, whilst preventing themselves from being exposed as racist and accused of racism should they be audited.

The consultant uses laughter to negotiate his way through this potentially sticky acknowledgement of noting clients racially based requests.  Barnes et al. (2001) argue that laughter and humour are used in a non-threatening way "to introduce sensitive racial issues into conversation" (p.327).  The speakers' laughter invites the laughter of the other and allows the speaker to utter potentially racist comments without attributions of racism (ibid: 327).  The practice of noting clients' requests is an acknowledgement that they fulfil requests using 'race' as a specification.  The consultant is aware that I may accuse him of racism in responding to these requests and invites me to be complicit in his "secret" by sharing in his laughter.  Laughter allows the speaker to admit to racist practice without an angry response from me, which would be considered an inappropriate response to his laughter.  The consultant is therefore careful to communicate "in the right way" with me and with others so that "no-one else knows what you are talking about".

Practical strategies such as the coding outlined above, are not common-place according to other private recruitment consultants interviewed.  However, evidence that consultants think through the dilemma and engage in rhetoric to counter potential accusations of racism and

justify their practices can be found in their talk (Extract 4.6). In the following extract the consultant dialogues with herself and with me regarding requests for a "white female":

**Extract 4.6       Interview 6 Page 9**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | LIZ: | ... So, if a client says to you um "I'm looking for a white female for that position". You, |
| 2 | | you need to **say to yourself**, "Do I say to him I'm sorry I will not just send you white |
| 3 | | females, I will send you males and females of all colours that are capable of doing this |
| 4 | | position". Do you say that and risk losing that client? Because, let's face it what that client |
| 5 | | will do is say "If you don't want to supply me with the staff, I will go to another agency" |
| 6 | GERALDINE: | Hmm, hmm |
| 7 | LIZ: | **And you think to yourself** "But, I've got the people here. I've got the people that I can put |
| 8 | | into those positions". So, it is very, very difficult and I think coming from a smaller agency, |
| 9 | | rather than a larger agency. Smaller agencies **need**, they **need** those placements. They |
| 10 | | cannot be too selective in turning clients away or not. The bigger agencies can say, "This |
| 11 | | is, this is our policy. Take it or leave it". It's like how they negotiate rates as well. These |
| 12 | | are our rates, you don't want to pay the rates cheers, go to another agency. Whereas the |
| 13 | | smaller agencies will say, well these are our rates and the client might say ooh, then let's |
| 14 | | negotiate. And you're more prone to negotiate those rates because you want the business. |

In Extract 4.6 the recruitment consultant is engaging in dialogue with herself in terms of thinking through the dilemma (Line 2 – 4 and Line 7 – 8) and with me as social scientist researcher (Line 4 – 5 and Line 8 – 14). She engages in argumentation in order to justify and legitimise her practice of supplying clients with candidates using 'racial' criteria.

In both Extracts (4.5 and 4.6) the consultant constructs an argument of "need" that naturalises their responses to racially based requests. In Extract 4.5 the practice of noting clients racially based requests is justified as an "unfortunate requirement" born out of a "need to communicate". In a similar manner in Extract 4.6 the consultant positions their response as a "need" because they are a small agency and therefore they have no choice but to respond in this manner or face financial ruin. She therefore constructs herself as a reluctant participant – it is not that she wants to do this but that she "needs" to because of the size of this agency. These rhetorical phrases position the consultants as wishing things were different to how they are and their actions are a "need", much like we need to breathe or eat in order to survive. She positions herself as powerless in the face of this "need" and of these 'racially' based requests. A further rhetorical strategy (Extract 4.6) is to use reported direct speech. In this way the veracity of her account is difficult to question. These rhetorical strategies function to distance the consultants from potential accusations of racism in complying with these requests.

## 4.3. Constructing 'whiteness' and 'blackness'

The privatisation of racism cannot be viewed outside the history of segregation in South Africa. Nor can it be seen as outside our current context of anti-racist legislation. We turn to the contradictory way in which private recruitment consultants talk about 'white' and 'black' candidates and reproduce racism. The analysis will elucidate how the construction of 'white' and 'black' is used to justify the recruitment and selection of candidates using 'racial' criteria and serves as a platform for justifying 'racial' privilege and the conservation of a 'racial' hierarchy whilst countering potential allegations of racism and positioning themselves as non-racist.

The construction of 'white' and 'black' found in the consultants talk rests on an assumption of 'racial' privilege. I will argue that this 'racial' privilege is not articulated in a blatant manner as might have been encountered during the apartheid era. Rather, political transformation over the last decade that has meant that racist talk is socially unacceptable and illegal. We therefore no longer have "white-only" establishments or schools and no longer talk about 'black' people in derogatory terms. However this "move towards an ostensibly 'race-blind' society has not meant an overthrowing of white privilege" (Wander, Martin, and Nakayama, 1999: 21). Rather, I will argue, that the effect of consultants constructions of 'white' and 'black' serves to 'conserve' historical patterns of employment. Previous studies (cf. Duncan, 1996; Durrheim and Dixon, 2001a; Stevens, 1998) have tended to focus on the construction of 'black' and as such the construction of 'white' has remained relatively unexplored within South African social psychology (cf. Sennett and Foster, 1996 who examined the construction of 'white' social identity amongst English speaking South Africans). The analysis therefore commences with an examination of the construction of 'white' as the norm before turning to the construction of 'black' as a requirement and deficient. Although these constructions are examined separately, it must be noted that this division is artificial. The construction of 'white' as norm is dependent on the construction of 'black' as a requirement and deficient, and vice versa.

### 4.3.1. 'White' as the norm

"My project is an effort to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers, from the serving to the served" (Toni Morrison, 1991 as cited in Johnson, 1999: 1)

This section works from the premise that the construction of 'whiteness' has been insufficiently interrogated in South Africa and aims to elucidate how the construction of 'whiteness' conserves historical employment patterns. The construction of 'white' as the norm is a component of a two-part rhetorical manoeuvre used by private recruitment consultants to justify the conservation of historical employment practices and thus 'racial' privilege. In the following extracts consultants construct 'race' as a real category, based on 'real' differences, not only in terms of colour but also in terms of suitability and standards. Implicit in their arguments is the reference to 'white' norms, for it is this 'race' group that meets the requirements in terms of suitability and standards for employment.

**Extract 4.7**      **Interview 6 Pages 10 – 11**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | LIZ: | I will say to them "I know you said you were looking for a white female but let me tell you |
| 2 | | about this candidate. Let me try and promote this candidate to you. Do me a favour and see |
| 3 | | them" And I can tell you right now, it's happened over and over and over again where you |
| 4 | | sway your client about having a mindset about employing a **white** female, eventually |
| 5 | | employing a **person of colour**. |
| 6 | GERALDINE: | Ja |
| 7 | LIZ: | It's amazing |
| 8 | GERALDINE: | Ja, um and I'm just wondering if part of it is because of your experience in the industry |
| 9 | | whereas perhaps somebody who is a younger consultant might not, might make a different |
| 10 | | call? Might rather say, okay hang on let me see. I actually want this client. I need this |
| 11 | | client. I've got targets to meet. |
| 12 | LIZ: | Ja |
| 13 | GERALDINE: | Let me make this call |
| 14 | LIZ: | Ja |
| 15 | GERALDINE: | and I say fine I will supply you only with |
| 16 | LIZ: | I think it is **experience**, um but I think also at the end of the day the client will respect you |
| 17 | | so much more if you (.) **can make a judgement call by producing the best** person for that |
| 18 | | position. And I think that, that is paramount. I think that is the one thing that agencies |
| 19 | | should be. At the end of the day we must try and do, supply the **most suitable** candidate, |
| 20 | | the **most capable** candidate. Because **you've got to deliver a service to that client**. The |
| 21 | | service to your client is supplying them with the best labour force. And if **I believe, in my** |
| 22 | | **experience** and I can **stand behind it** that this individual, **being of a different colour**, is |
| 23 | | **most suitable**, that's the person I am selling to my client. That is [inaudible] because that is |
| 24 | | what I firmly believe in. |

**Extract 4.8**      **Interview 5 Page 3**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | GERALDINE: | [inaudible] race [inaudible] candidate [question how people would specify 'white' without |
| 2 | | using 'race' as the criteria?]. |
| 3 | ANDRE: | [inaudible] candidate who is not required to drive during the office hours for a job to have a |
| 4 | | vehicle. Or a candidate who does not really need to use Afrikaans in their day-to-day work |
| 5 | | [inaudible] often means that they are not **interested** in **people of colour** |

**Extract 4.9**      **Interview 2 Page 8 – 9**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | PATRICK: | You know, at the end of the day it's the **person who has the competence to do the job**. |
| 2 | | That is more and more what our employers are saying. Anybody, as long as they can do the |
| 3 | | job |
| 4 | GERALDINE: | (//) as they can do |
| 5 | | the job. |
| 6 | PATRICK: | If it's a black person, I'll probably take that in preference. If the **white male can do the job** |
| 7 | | and **the black person can't**, I'm **not going to take the black person**. Actually, that's what |

8
9

the **legislation says**. It doesn't say you should just take somebody on their colour but on their ability or their potential.

Through the use of the phrase "person of colour" (Extract 4.7 and Extract 4.8) 'white' is the implicit reference point from which to work. It is not 'whites' who are spoken about as "person of colour" but 'black', 'Indian' and 'coloured' candidates. In Extract 4.7 the use of the phrase "being of a different colour" constructs an argument for 'white' as the norm or default position. This negative definition of 'white' by default, due to a lack of any other 'racial' or ethnic feature, thus positions 'white' as a non-colour and places 'white' within an invisible, universalistic and therefore neutral category (Nakayama and Krizek, 1999: 97 – 98; Sennett and Foster, 1996). This common-place understanding of 'white' thus requires no additional argument. The function is that 'white' remains unexamined and therefore unchallenged as the norm.

The explicit argument that 'race' as irrelevant in the recruitment and selection of candidates (Extract 4.7 and Extract 4.9) functions as a distracter. That is it directs attentions away from the construction of 'white' as the norm. This argument for 'white' as the norm and the "most suitable" is not explicitly articulated however; the comparison is present in Extract 4.7 and Extract 4.9. In Extract 4.9 the consultant positions the "white male" as competent and the "black male" is incompetent. The co-existence of 'race' and competency is not arbitrary. The consultant (Extract 4.9) speaks with an awareness of potential accusations of racism to their argument of 'white' as competent and 'black' as incompetent by drawing on legislation to bolster his position and justify his choice of candidate in terms of "ability or potential". It is 'whites' that are positioned as meeting the requirements in terms of competency, ability or potential.

The variations in the use of 'race' can be seen as the consultants use terms such as "suitability" and "competence" to construct 'race' as irrelevant in recruitment and selection, whilst making 'race' salient to the understanding of suitability by reference to people "of a different colour" or to 'white' and 'black' candidates. It is apparent that they deny using 'racial' criteria couched in the language of 'racial' categorisation. The denial of 'race' as relevant in recruitment functions to distance consultants from potential allegations of racism.

Through the use of phrases such as "I believe" and "my experience" which they can "stand behind" (Line 21 – 22), the consultant assigns themselves the moral position to adequately judge what is and is not "most suitable".

Thus the co-existence of "person of colour" or "black" and suitability, capability and competence is not accidental. Rather the co-existence of these two performs a particular function, namely to construct "white' as competent and meeting the required standard and this justifies 'racial' privilege in terms of employment practices.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Extract 4.10** | **Interview 8 Page 5** | |
| 1 | THERESA: | (Discussing employment equity placements) There's a lot of **compromises** being made out |
| 2 | | there where the, the um, organisations who are **under pressure** through who or what power |
| 3 | | or the environment in which they operate under **huge threats** to **bring these people in**. |
| 4 | | And they are being **forced** to make **compromises**. (.) It's scary that they should do that |
| 5 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 6 | THERESA: | because it actually **compromises** (.) creates this **huge problem** |

The argument of 'white' as the norm and meeting the required standard is extended in Extract 4.10, where the consultant juxtapositions past and present recruitment and selection procedures. Through the use of terms such as "compromise" the present is constructed as being compromised and not meeting the standards of the past. Employment equity has meant that things have changed and not for the better! The entire vocabulary suggests a deviation from the accepted norms of the past and the current position of employment equity has to be imposed, indicating a moral position that the historical status quo was correct. Employment equity candidates are viewed as compromising the historically established standards – a euphemism for the previous 'white' dispensation. Through this argument 'white' is constructed as meeting the standards and 'black' is constructed as only achieving positions in organisation due to "pressure" and "huge threats". 'Black' people are argued to be unworthy candidates as compared to 'whites'. Employment equity candidates are constructed as deficient and as achieving positions only due to outside intervention. Through her appeal to "compromised" 'white' standards of the past, she engages in racist rhetoric that reproduces racism whilst clearly conscious of the potential allegations of racism. Furthermore the use of terms such as "huge threats" and "force" positions organisations (and the consultant in meeting such "demands") as powerless to resist.

It is people of "a different colour" and not 'whites' who are the subject to scrutiny. If 'blacks', 'coloureds' or 'Indians' were to meet the 'white' standard and judged suitable then

they would be sold to clients (Extract 4.7, Line 22). Skin colour thus remains a concern that "allows us to rank order people for practical things" (Wander et al., 1999: 14).

**Extract 4.11     Interview 3 Page 1 – 2**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | HANK: | Okay, so we're dealing with, with **unskilled labour** so, **so right from the start** just the basics **teaching of what is right and what is wrong** in, in office environments, and in factory environments cos we've taken people with no previous work experience. So **sort of grooming them in that level.** Um (.) plus **just different, again going down to cultural differences.** Um, trying to stop [inaudible] taking place, managing safety, keeping up with NOSA |
| 7 | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 8 | HANK: | and that, sort of thing. Or **training. Constant training** |
| 9 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 10 | HANK: | **You know.** Don't touch this, don't go behind here. Stand left, stand right, keep behind the red line, keep (.) **You know** |
| 12 | GERALDINE: | all those kind of things. |
| 13 | HANK: | (.) And then **they** are snogging behind the (.) uugh [sighs and laughs] |
| 14 | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 15 | HANK: | [Laughing] the machine. It's not quite appropriate to do that particular thing at this particular point in time because you could cut someone's finger off because you're not focusing. **You know that sort of thing.** |
| 18 | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 19 | HANK: | **You know** it's time consuming. Like we have a lot more disciplinary action there because um again, **going back to cultural things. Somebody dies you go for ten days. You don't tell anybody. You just disappear for ten days.** |
| 22 | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 23 | HANK: | Okay, so again it's like what's happened? Has the person absconded? What do we do? We obviously need to take action here. So sometimes we have to take disciplinary action. So we're constantly, because we're managing on behalf of the client, I have to, we have to go in. Um discipline or performance manage |

Although this consultant does not talk in terms of "skin colour", they naturalise difference and construct a hierarchy by using terms such as "culture" and "unskilled labour". The consultant thus assumes that I (historically defined as 'white') am aware of the 'race' of those who are the subject of scrutiny. Through their use of the term "culture" rather than 'race' the consultant positions themselves as sensitive and tolerant (which is important in the new South Africa; cf. Durrheim et al., 2001b) whilst defending 'white' norms and business practices. The consultant speaks with an awareness of the stigma attached to 'racial' categorisation and the use of 'race' terminology in the new South Africa (cf. Bakhtin, 1988). These 'white' norms and cultural practices are viewed as sensible and require no further argument to justify them. However, the effects of cultural discourse are no different to the effects of 'race' talk that might previously have been encountered. The term 'culture' is therefore used by South Africans to explain and justify 'racial' segregation and privilege in post apartheid South Africa (Durrheim and Dixon, 2001b).

Through their prolific use of "you know" (Extract 4.11), the consultant appeals to norms and common knowledge about the way things are and should be. This rhetorical manoeuvre rules out rival hypothesis about the way things are as counter arguments would not only go against nature but against "a shared and accepted knowledge of the natural" (Durrheim and Dixon, 2001b).

'Racial' categories are constructed as a natural consequence of differences in "colour" and "culture". These differences between 'races' are argued as 'natural' and it is therefore to be expected that certain 'races' will naturally be better "suited" for certain positions than other 'races'. The construction of 'white' as the norm and meeting the required standard positions them as 'naturally' at the top of this socially constructed 'racial' hierarchy and deserving of this privilege. However, 'racial' categorisation has a long history in South Africa and thus the construction of 'white' as the norm is articulated and argued for in a more subtle way (cf. Sears, 1988). This subtle rhetorical articulation allows consultants to distance themselves from potential allegations of racism whilst arguing for 'whites' as superior and deserving of 'racial' privilege.

### 4.3.2. 'Black' as a requirement

We turn to the construction of 'black' amongst private recruitment agencies. The following extracts consider the second part of private recruitment consultant's construction of 'racial' hierarchy and thus privilege by elucidating how 'black' is constructed. Recruitment consultants extend the construction of a 'racial' hierarchy and privilege of 'whites' as justified by arguing that 'black' is a requirement and deficient in terms of skills, personality and experience.

| Extract 4.12 | Interview 1 Page 8 |
|---|---|
| 1<br>2<br>3 | CRAIG: | That is the discussions are (.) are fairly open (.) where (.) um (.) affirmative action and black candidates (.) they (.) If, if the client is wanting a black candidate in the hook up meeting they will say, **"It is an affirmative action, but the client wants a black applicant"** |
| 4 | GERALDINE: | Okay. Alright (.) so people are quite open about |
| 5<br>6<br>7 | CRAIG: | Yes, it's not. Within a consultancy it's not a **hidden fact**. We <u>need</u> to be open so that we know **what the client's requirements are**. Even if (.) even though it initiated in being a <u>wrong</u> (.) um |
| 8 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 9 | CRAIG: | **requirement** |
| 10 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 11<br>12<br>13 | CRAIG: | **If you would call it a wrong requirement**. Um (.) but within our organisation **we need to know exactly what the client is requiring** and therefore we have to () um (.) sort of be open (.) and say right (.) although they have specified affirmative action but the client is |

| 14 | | **actually looking for a black candidate** ...Mm, you see. So we have to say <u>right</u> |
| 15 | | affirmative action. So if they, like that girl over there says right **I have a black accountant** |
| 16 | | **that's perfect for that job.** |
| 17 | GERALDINE: | Mmm, mm |
| 18 | CRAIG: | Then she might have a **white guy** perfect for that job, but when you say black candidate, she |
| 19 | | says, "**Okay, I have a white guy. He's perfect for the job, except that he's not black**" |
| 20 | GERALDINE: | Mm, mm |
| 21 | CRAIG: | At least then (.) you just , communi (.) communication is open. **That you <u>know</u> exactly** |
| 22 | | **what the requirements of the client are.** And that is one of our main, sort of main criteria |
| 23 | | as I said to earlier |
| 24 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 25 | CRAIG: | Of (.) of (.) uh (.) this industry. **That you have to know what your client is looking for.** |

### Extract 4.13    Interview 8 Pages 5 – 6

| 1 | THERESA: | But if you are looking for a financial director you've got to (.) **You can't just create those** |
| 2 | | **guys overnight. And that's the reality of it** ...There are certain areas where there is um, |
| 3 | | um quite a lot of, there is quite a big pool in the HR field (talking about employment equity |
| 4 | | candidates) |
| 5 | GERALDINE: | Hmm, mmm |
| 6 | THERESA: | Um and what you'll find is that um, if a HR position comes onto the market it will be quite |
| 7 | | clear that it is non-negotiable. **I want a black.** |
| 8 | GERALDINE: | Hmm, mmm |

### Extract 4.14    Interview 6 Page 7

| 1 | LIZ: | Taking you one step back, and I'm sure this is what you want to hear, is when the client sort |
| 2 | | of says to you "I'm looking for that specific position, as I've just mentioned to you an |
| 3 | | electronic engineer, **but it has to be an affirmative action candidate**" |
| 4 | GERALDINE: | Aha |
| 5 | LIZ: | That has got to be **the most difficult brief,** because let's face it um there are certain |
| 6 | | disciplines in the country, the job market, that are not, are disciplines that **are not** |
| 7 | | **frequently (.) um (.) frequented by affirmative candidates.** |

### Extract 4.15    Interview 11 Page 5

| 1 | SARAH: | (Talking about employment equity and the quota's system) Um, so depending on what their |
| 2 | | percentages are, so they actually say we have enough, **we've met our percentages or** |
| 3 | | **quota on these.** |
| 4 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 5 | SARAH: | This is where we are falling short, ideally if we could find someone who is fitting into that |
| 6 | | **category.** That would be our first choice. |
| 7 | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 8 | SARAH: | But if we don't then we'll consider any of the others. |
| 9 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 10 | SARAH: | Um, so it doesn't always come down to the colour. **I mean obviously the calibre of the** |
| 11 | | **candidate is, is of the utmost importance.** |
| 12 | GERALDINE: | Ja |
| 13 | SARAH: | They need to **be able to do the job.** Um, and that is, is considered when you look at the |
| 14 | | candidates. |

In the above extracts (4.12 – 4.15) 'black' (or 'affirmative action) is constructed as a "requirement" that consultants need to meet in fulfilling clients' requests. In Extract 4.12 and 4.13 'black' is constructed as a requirement much like requesting certain skills or qualifications (like being an accountant or an HR professional). In Extract 4.12 this is done by the reference to a "white guy" who meets all the specifications, in fact is "perfect for the

job, except he is not black". The co-existence of 'race' and skills/qualification alongside each other in the consultants talk constructs requesting 'black' as comparable to requiring certain skills. This functions as imbuing 'black' with the neutrality of skills and allows consultants to talk about and reproduce 'race' categories with impunity.

Furthermore the concern is in meeting the quota (Extract 4.14) in terms of 'racial' categories. The consultant thus acknowledges government intervention in the form of the Employment Equity Act of 1998, which legislated that businesses were to reflect the demographics of the country within a certain timeframe. However, the consultants comment that the "calibre of the candidate is, is of the utmost importance" after their talk on employment equity, is not a neutral one. Rather such comments serve as a silent criticism of this system and the promotion of 'affirmative action' candidates who are viewed as inferior. Questions concerning the calibre of 'affirmative action' candidates are put forward in a manner that allows consultants to maintain their position of non-racism whilst making racist utterances. Furthermore 'affirmative action' candidates are constructed as inferior and of achieving position due to outside demands rather than due to their own abilities or skills.
'Race' is thus a salient "requirement" in the recruitment and selection of candidates, whilst at the same time is constructed as a neutral category just like skills or qualifications that need to be met. This allows consultants to talk about and construct 'black' in a particular manner, namely as deficient. Our analysis therefore turns to how 'black' is constructed as deficient in terms of skills, qualifications and personality.

### 4.3.3. 'Black' as deficient

The construction of 'black' has been examined within the South African context (cf. Stevens, 1998; Duncan, 1996). However, Duncan's (1996) study utilised data gathered prior to the 1994 General Elections, which ushered in a new dispensation that legislated against racism (cf. The Constitution of 1993, Employment Equity Act of 1998 and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act of 2000). One of the premises of this study was that 'race' talk would reflect the socio-political transformation that had occurred. Recruitment consultants would therefore speak with an awareness of the illegal nature of racist talk and the denigration of 'black' people. The construction of 'black' as deficient was therefore unanticipated and is the second part of the construction and 'conservation' (Goldberg, 1998) of 'racial' hierarchy and historical 'racial' privilege in post-apartheid South

Africa. The construction of 'black' as deficient positions the consultants (and clients') practices of recruiting and selecting 'white' candidates as reasonable and understandable and is used to justify why 'blacks' have not attained positions in the private sector.

This construction of a 'racial' hierarchy is extended by arguing that 'black' is deficient in terms of skills, experience and personality. 'Black' failing is used to justify 'white' position and privilege, a finding supported by Stevens (1998) and Duncan (1996). We turn to how 'black' is constructed in private recruitment in the new South Africa and examine how consultants counter potential criticism of these constructions and position themselves as non-racist. In the extracts below 'black' is constructed as deficient in terms of skills / qualifications:

| Extract 4.16 | **Interview 5 Page 2** |
|---|---|
| 1   ANDRE: | (Talking about 'race' specification by clients). **They don't have to say** [inaudible] um (.) |
| 2 | basically **you don't have to say.** Um, basically if you know your client **you don't have to** |
| 3 | **say.** |
| 4   GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 5   ANDRE: | If you're looking for an executive secretary [inaudible] **good** person. **You're not really** |
| 6 | **looking for an African person who might battle a bit with \|inaudible\| English or the** |
| 7 | **computer.** Yourself (.) you judge the situation and you are forwarding only your most |
| 8 | **high-powered** white secretaries because they (.) um, computers (.) Your **African** |
| 9 | **secretaries are not really computer \|literate\|. But, I don't know maybe I am saying the** |
| 10 | **wrong things now \|laughs\|.** But if I am looking for an executive secretary **I don't even** |
| 11 | **look at affirmative action.** Clients don't have to say anything **because his secretary is** |
| 12 | **white** and he is looking for a white lady |
| 13   GERALDINE: | Okay. So it is completely unspoken (.) unsaid |
| 14   ANDRE: | Yes. The **client may be an African person himself. Or like I had an Indian client who** |
| 15 | **was looking for a white secretary.** [inaudible] quite open. Although I did put forward a |
| 16 | coloured [inaudible] can do well. |

| Extract 4.17 | **Interview 11 Page 5 – 6** |
|---|---|
| 1   SARAH: | Clients tend to be wary of where qualifications have (.) have been done |
| 2   GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 3   SARAH: | Um, I mean for example **they** would assume that a qualification from University of Natal |
| 4 | holds more weight than a qualification from, um the University of the North West. |
| 5   GERALDINE: | Hmm, hmm |
| 6   SARAH: | Because (.) **I suppose** it would have to do with the **level of, of, of work that gets** done and |
| 7 | the level of lecturing or whatever. They, they [inaudible] come out of those (.) uh those |
| 8 | colleges. |
| 9   GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 10   SARAH: | **I don't know how true that is** but certainly **the market** (.) |
| 11   GERALDINE: | *(//)* assumption |
| 12   SARAH: | *(//)* **perception.** The |
| 13 | **assumption** is that, for example if we are going to look at people who are going to do their |
| 14 | (.) um their internship at XXX or whatever. They would say we are looking for someone |
| 15 | with a degree, but from Cape Town, or the University of Natal or whatever, whatever, |
| 16 | because those are our **preference** is that they **need** to come from those universities. I would |
| 17 | **presume** it has to do with the **fact** that the uh **level of work** (.) **that gets done is a lot** |
| 18 | **better.** |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 19 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 20 | SARAH: | there. Um, then perhaps in a more **practical** point of view [inaudible] I would imagine |
| 21 | | they **base it on some sort of (.) uh experience that they've had.** But generally the market |
| 22 | | is full of candidates, but obviously because **they** don't have the opportunity to go to the |
| 23 | | University of Natal, the person has to go to the University of Zululand. You find that |
| 24 | | [inaudible] **black universities**, clients tend to be very wary about qualifications from there |
| 25 | | and also because of **a lot of places where people have bought qualifications from these** |
| 26 | | **places.** From these institutions (.) um (.). Not directly from these institutions but bearing |
| 27 | | that institutions name. |
| 28 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 29 | SARAH: | It kind of gives the impression that that is **not a first rate** |
| 30 | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 31 | SARAH: | university. Just as the same as people [inaudible] University from Cambridge or Yale or |
| 32 | | Harvard. You know where you compare their qualifications if they've got a masters from |
| 33 | | there with (.) In the market today they would have a kind of edge when they, when they're |
| 34 | | going to see a client. Um, to someone who has done it from RAU. And I think the same is |
| 35 | | here. You have done it at one of the recognised universities that have an edge// |
| 36 | GERALDINE: | //Hmm |
| 37 | SARAH: | //over those that **clients don't know anything about.** Um, you know so that's how it |
| 38 | | works. But generally in positions where you would require a lot of formal qualifications |
| 39 | | then that is where there is a shortage of candidates. |

In Extract 4.16 the unspoken 'race' requirement is based on their knowledge of the client. This is an acknowledgement of the illegal nature of 'race' requests, as articulating these requests leaves the consultant, and their client, open to criticism. The consultant however justifies the practice of placing 'white' woman as opposed to 'black' woman by appealing to a stereotypical notion of 'black' people as unable to speak English and as technologically backwards. The use of the words such as "might", "a bit" and the initial unspoken 'race' requirement allows the recruitment consultant to counter any challenges by arguing that the possibility exists of finding an African secretary that is a competent, computer literate English speaker. In this way they leave themselves an opening to counter potential allegations of racism. This conceptualisation of 'black' people is extended in phrases like not "good" enough and not "high powered". The justification for the recruitment practices thus falls on the constructed deficiencies of the 'black' candidate and not the consultants' practices. Furthermore the use of racially based requests by African or Indian clients is used to justify and legitimise these requests for all contexts. Thus African and Indian clients' request for 'white' candidates is comparable to 'white' clients requesting 'white' candidates.

In Extract 4.17 the consultant constructs an argument around "preference". In this way the selection of 'white' candidates is justified. The denigration of 'black' candidates is justified in terms of qualifications and individual choice or preference (Goldberg, 1998). The consultant distances themselves from clients' practices by using phrases such as "presume", "I suppose", "perceptions" and "I don't know how true that is", whilst making racist

accusations of illegal practice (in terms of purchasing qualifications) on the part of 'blacks' and casting aspersions on the quality of education received at historically 'black' universities.

This consultant lays claim to knowledge of the market 'out-there' and how it operates whilst distancing themselves from such activities and thus countering potential allegations of racism (Extract 4.17). The manner in which their argument is structured would allow them to respond to potential challenges with "This is not how I see it but how others see it".

The comparison between historically predominantly 'white' and 'black' universities is used to justify current practices. It is based on a common-place understanding of how 'white' and 'black' universities are that requires no additional argument and draws on "experience" to justify these views. The use of "experience" adds weight to the argument and thus difficult to counter. The construction of 'black' as deficient in terms of qualifications and personal characteristics (for some of 'them' buy their qualifications) is used to justify their current position. whilst the consultant distances themselves from potential challenges to this construction. They are therefore able to maintain the high moral ground of the unprejudiced.

The racist practice is however "communicated in an equivocal and ambivalent manner (Billig. 1996) with the consultants: "But, I don't know maybe I am saying the wrong things now [laughs]" (Extract 4.16). An acknowledgement of potential criticism for racist practice whilst denying it by constructing 'black' executive secretaries as incompetent and unskilled.

The construction of 'black' as deficient is extended in the following extract where a 'black' candidate is deficient in terms of experience:

**Extract 4.18     Interview 8 Page 7**

| | |
|---|---|
| THERESA: | ... and I said, "Well, you're going to have to compromise on, on (.) You'll get yourself a CA but you are going to have to **compromise in terms of experience**. And you may find somebody who has got two to three years of experience **versus fifteen twenty years of experience.** |

1
2
3
4

In Extract 4.18 the consultant has been discussing a clients' request for an employment equity candidate in the banking industry and argues that the placement of a 'black' Chartered Accountant in this position is a "compromise in terms of experience". In this manner the 'black' person is constructed as deficient in contrast to someone who has "fifteen twenty years of experience". Although unsaid, this "somebody" is a 'white' Chartered Accountant.

They build an argument for 'black' candidates as deficient by appealing to unspoken norms of business that suggest that higher level financial positions require experience as translated in this narrow context.

The following extract extends the argument of 'black' as deficient in terms of culture and personality:

### Extract 4.19     Interview 8 Page 6

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | THERESA: | because **they** do exist and that will go a long way towards making up their quotas.  They |
| 2 | | may not find that person but they probably will find a black HR director (.)  Uhh, the |
| 3 | | difficulty out there of course is that there is such a shortage (.) |
| 4 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 5 | THERESA: | and **they** are not, **they're** not sticking around for very long |
| 6 | GERALDINE: | okay |
| 7 | THERESA: | and **they're** going to the next highest bidder and |
| 8 | GERALDINE: | Hmm, mm |
| 9 | THERESA: | A financial manager to a black empowerment group.  Due to start on the first of June and |
| 10 | | he'd he'd resigned on the first of May.  Signed the letter of appointment about two weeks |
| 11 | | prior to this and I think after he had signed my letter of appointment I ran another advert for |
| 12 | | quite a high level.  I phoned him up and I said "Excuse me, what are you doing?" |
| 13 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 14 | THERESA: | "Ooooh", he says. "Is that Theresa du Bruin?  Ooh geez".  So I said, what are you doing |
| 15 | | applying for this position?  Look I've just placed you.  You haven't even started the job". |
| 16 | | He said, "Listen, I've got to look after myself (.)  I'll go where the, where the best |
| 17 | | opportunities lie".  I don't know.  It just gives you an indication of **their own perceptions** |
| 18 | | **of what is happening in the market place playing one off against the other.** |

### Extract 4.20     Interview 8 Page 12 – 13

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | THERESA: | I mean there are certain areas in our business where we have failed.  I mean **I would call it** |
| 2 | | **cultures.**  But **the way we work** (.)  I mean our consultants, I'm thinking of XXX largely |
| 3 | | where they've had these **experiences** |
| 4 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 5 | THERESA: | are **highly incentivised** |
| 6 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 7 | THERESA: | and in fact in all of the cases of our top consultants |
| 8 | GERALDINE: | Hmm, mm |
| 9 | THERESA: | they produce **serious numbers** and they make **serious money**.  We have **never been able** |
| 10 | | **to bring black person in with a belief in themselves** |
| 11 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 12 | THERESA: | except one.  After their, (.) eventually when things have got so [inaudible] **left with a total** |
| 13 | | **disaster behind them.**  Start again and bring somebody else in.  **We go to great lengths to** |
| 14 | | **identify our needs and get someone with the right attitude and the right skills** |
| 15 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 16 | THERESA: | **We have spent hundreds of hundreds of thousands of rands.  Millions** and every single |
| 17 | | one has failed.  There, there just seems to be (.) a **lack of entrepreneurial** (.) of (.) **talent.** |
| 18 | | And if they exist we can't find them … Because it is all been done in the **best of intentions** |
| 19 | | **from our side** to really really transform our business but every single time |
| 20 | GERALDINE: | Hmmm |
| 21 | THERESA: | and on one occasion we identified somebody who really had it.  He started to look positive, |
| 22 | | to get some results.  Our business is very, very white. |
| 23 | GERALDINE: | And generally in speaking to recruitment consultants I have noticed that a lot of the business |
| 24 | | is.  Why [inaudible]? |
| 25 | THERESA: | The scary part is that very talented [inaudible] I came into this business on commission only |

| 26 | GERALDINE: | Hmm, mmm |
| 27 | THERESA: | No existing salary took all the risks and was successful. And, and earned a great deal of |
| 28 | | money |
| 29 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 30 | THERESA: | **They just walk in the door for a few days** and then move on because they realise they are |
| 31 | | going to be fired. |

Van Dijk (1992) argues that speakers often draw on experience to construct an argument that portrays them as non-racist whilst engaging in racist talk. In Extract 4.19 and 4.20 'black' is constructed as deficient in terms of "culture" and personality. There is something in "the way we work" (namely 'whites') that is different from the way "they" work (namely 'blacks'). Thus the 'racial' division is put forward as 'natural' due to inherent differences between 'white' and 'black' (in terms of culture, work ethic, etc.) that are visible to all.

'White' consultants are constructed as meeting the required standards because they bring in "serious money" and are the "top consultants", whereas 'black' consultants are constructed as failing. The consultant uses personal experience to justify her current views and construct 'racial' categories as normal. The reality of experience is difficult to counter and ensures that her response appears as reasonable. The consultancy is portrayed as going to "great lengths" and having "the best of intentions" in trying to reflect the demographics of this country. The lack of certain personality attributes on the part of 'blacks' (a "belief in themselves", "talent", "entrepreneurial" spirit, greed in going to "the next highest bidder" and self-centredness) is used to justify the failure of their business to reflect the demographics of this country. The consultant thus argues that it is because of the way 'black' people behave in business, that she holds her current views and the business does not reflect the demographics of the country. The victims of racism are constructed as 'failing' and held responsible for their current positions.

A strategy of positive self presentation and negative other presentation is found in 'race' talk (van Dijk, 1992). It is 'black' failing (and not 'white' racist practice) which is responsible for the current status quo and the victim is held responsible for their position in society. The consultant contrasts her own experience as a 'white' person with that of privileged 'black' consultants. Her experience of coming into the recruitment business with nothing and being successful is contrasted with 'black' people's experience of being provided with opportunities and this resulting in a "total disaster". The assumption of a level playing field

that serves as a basis for comparison functions to position the consultant as justified in holding their current views.

Through the use of anecdotal evidence the accuracy of her account cannot be verified or challenged (cf. Edwards, 2000; Potter, 1998). Through a number of rhetorical manoeuvres she constructs 'black' as deficient whilst justifying her own practices as non-racist.

The rhetorical manoeuvres of consultants in the construction of 'whiteness' and 'blackness', act as a platform for justifying and legitimising racist practice. 'Racial' categories are taken as natural and the current construction of 'white' as the norm and 'black' as deficient in terms of skills, qualifications and personality justifies the conservation of the historical and socially constructed 'racial' hierarchy. The stereotypical representations of 'blacks', aid in the perpetuation of racism. Their own practices (and those of their clients) can be viewed as non-racist when 'black' people are constructed as deficient. It is 'their' deficiencies that are the cause of the views, rather than the biases within the speaker (Billig et al., 1988: 108). Through their denial of racism, racism is reproduced!

## 4.4. The denial of racism

"Textual analysis has shown ... that modern racism is typically subtle and rhetorically complex, being concealed in the language of reasonableness and philanthropy" (Dixon et al., 1994: 280)

A number of researchers have noted that the denial of racism is very much a part of modern racist talk (Barker, 1981; Billig et al., 1988; Dixon et al., 1994; Durrheim et al., under review; Goldberg, 1998; Sears, 1988; Shotter, 1993; Potter and Wetherell, 1988 and 1987; van Dijk 1997 and 1992; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). Talk thus reflects the speaker's awareness of breaking the social norms of tolerance or acceptance. Van Dijk (1992) argued that denials come in many forms as "part of a strategy of *defence*" (p. 91; italics in original).

Consultants utilise various forms of denial to defend themselves against accusations of racism and position themselves as non-racist. They engage in the work of category construction (Billig, 1996) by splitting racism into 'unreasonable' racism, which is located externally and in the past, and 'reasonable' racism (Durrheim et al., under review), which is used to justify certain practices. The dominant consensus within the private recruitment industry is the

denial of racism. One of the functions of denying racism is that it means that it is not an issue that needs to be managed (cf. van Dijk, 1992). Denial functions to control resistance and make it difficult for those who say that racism exists, as resistance is not taken seriously. Denial therefore allows consultants to engage in practices that 'conserve' the historical status quo.

### 4.4.1. 'Unreasonable' racism

The definition offered by recruitment consultants of 'unreasonable' racism constructs them as non-racist (Barker, 1981: 4). Consultants externalise racism by accusing clients of being 'unreasonably' racist and these accusations function to distance consultants from clients' racially based requests.

The construction of unreasonable racism is demonstrated in the anecdotal request for a tall, slim blue-eyed blonde with nice legs. This metaphor (Wetherell and Potter, 1992) or "symbol of prejudice behaviour" (Billig et al., 1988: 115) is found in a number of extracts below. Consultants utilise this metaphor in defining unreasonable racism as explicit or blatant requests. The use of empiricist criterion in defining unreasonable racism places consultants outside the ranks of the racists and within the moral community of the unprejudiced (Billig, 1988).

**Extract 4.21    Interview 2 Page 6**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | PATRICK: | You know it's **not as sinister as, as people make it out to be** |
| 2 | GERALDINE: | Ja |
| 3 | PATRICK: | It used to be. |
| 4 | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 5 | PATRICK: | **It used to be horrific.** And, and people have **come round a lot**, a long way. |
| 6 | GERALDINE: | Okay, now. You say you've seen a lot of change. How would it have been in the past in, in |
| 7 | | comparison to say now? |
| 8 | PATRICK: | Well, if you go back ten years |
| 9 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 10 | PATRICK: | they would phone you up and say "**I want a twenty three year old, blonde, with nice** |
| 11 | | **legs**" and you know [laughs] |
| 12 | GERALDINE: | [laughs] |
| 13 | PATRICK: | for a receptionist |
| 14 | | [Both laugh] |
| 15 | PATRICK: | Nobody would **dare** phone up and say that now. |
| 16 | GERALDINE: | They wouldn't even dream of it |
| 17 | PATRICK: | No, they know they are not allowed to do that anymore. Okay, they might phone up and |
| 18 | | say, "**Well, we've always have had a European before**" |
| 19 | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 20 | PATRICK: | Or something like that but I would say not as, not as |
| 21 | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 22 | PATRICK: | **explicit.** |

**Extract 4.22**     **Interview 3 Page 4**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | HANK: | [inaudible] We had a fax just the other day. I was in absolute hysterics. |
| 2 | GERALDINE: | Oh, oh |
| 3 | HANK: | Faxed through, from a company, we knew exactly what he wanted. **He wanted tall, slim** |
| 4 | | **and blonde. Between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four.** Everyone just laughed. |
| 5 | | [Laughter] **You know,** this is it. We will not |
| 6 | GERALDINE: | [laughs] |
| 7 | HANK: | listen to that. |
| 8 | GERALDINE: | Ja |
| 9 | HANK: | We will not allow to. I mean we can't, we can't possibly. If you looking for someone you |
| 10 | | are looking for a South African and we will find you the right South African that can do the |
| 11 | | job. |

**Extract 4.23**     **Interview 9 Page 2**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | GERALDINE: | So you wouldn't necessarily have experiences that previously [inaudible] where people just |
| 2 | | requested clients on the basis of things like (.) race (.) and age (.) and gender |
| 3 | DAVID: | **Well (.) I hate to say it but it still happens (.) often** |
| 4 | GERALDINE: | Oh okay |
| 5 | DAVID: | [laughs] |
| 6 | GERALDINE: | Alright |
| 7 | DAVID: | It definitely still happens |
| 8 | GERALDINE: | And this is what I kind of figured (.) and I'm wondering how (.) how you would handle |
| 9 | | that? |
| 10 | DAVID: | Ja (.) well we are kind of caught between a rock and a hard place because |
| 11 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 12 | DAVID: | Because we have a data base of <u>exceptionally</u> good candidates (.) |
| 13 | GERALDINE: | (///) Hm, mm |
| 14 | DAVID: | (.) **but people** are still somehow reluctant to accept people into the formal work place |
| 15 | GERALDINE: | Hmm, mmm |
| 16 | DAVID: | We do our best to market (.) um (.) but if people come to you and say "I am looking for a |
| 17 | | secretary. **She must be blonde and have beautiful legs**" (.) **You get knocked for a six** |
| 18 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 19 | DAVID: | but we're in the business to tailor make our [processes] to suit our clients' needs. |
| 20 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 21 | DAVID: | And **unfortunately** if that is **what he wants** then that is what **we have to provide.** |

In the above extracts (4.21 – 4.23) the consultant draws on the metaphor of a: "twenty three year old blonde with nice legs" in building a definition of unreasonable racism as explicit talk. By positioning themselves as being able to identify racism and by accusing clients of racist requests, they distance themselves from these requests.

A feature of all three extracts is the role that laughter plays in the construction of unreasonable racism. As Barnes et al. (2000) argue that laughter is used to displace tension commonly associated with 'racial' discourse and to present the speaker as non-racist. The consultants' laughter invites my laughter and is used to mock the stereotyped racist, thus distancing the speaker from inferences of racism, whilst reproducing these stereotypes.

The denial of racism can be seen in their disbelieving laughter, their "absolute hysterics" and comment: "We will not listen to that. We will not allow it" (Extract 4.22), which positions them as non-racist. Thus consultants distance themselves from racially based requests (Extract 4.23 Line 14) and position themselves in opposition to these requests by being "knocked for a six" (Extract 4.23). After all, only non-racists would be taken aback by such explicit requests.

The use of "you know" (Extract 4.22) appeals to me to position myself as part of the community that finds such blatant requests abhorrent. The rejection and denial of blatant racism allows the consultants to occupy a position of moral rectitude. To counter potential accusations of racism they construct themselves as passive agents who are "unfortunately" suiting "clients' needs" (Extract 4.23). They accuse clients of 'unreasonable' racism. As such 'unreasonable' racism lies out-there (van Dijk, 1992). In defining explicit racism as out-there they are able to shift attention from their own racist practice.

The use of metaphor (Extract 4.21 – 4.23) allows consultants to construct a comprehensive definition of racism without an explicit mention of 'race'. The consultants appear to be more comfortable in including gender and not 'race' in offering a definition of unreasonable racism.

| **Extract 4.24** | **Interview 3 Pages 5 – 6** |
|---|---|
| 1  HANK: | We have had incidences where they have said, "Look, we do believe a male **would suit this** |
| 2 | **position better** because they have to lift heavy boxes. |
| 3  GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 4  HANK: | "or um, weave and beam, because they have to go into awful areas. [inaudible] You know, |
| 5 | it wouldn't be safe for a **woman** to travel into those sorts of areas. **They only say** |
| 6 | **preferable. They haven't said must be**, which doesn't deter us from sending a candidate |
| 7 | that we feel is able to hold her own in that particular situation. Or that might need to go and |
| 8 | demonstrate chain saws for arguments sake. |
| 9  GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 10 HANK: | But **there can't be too many** women wanting to go and demonstrate chain saws. You |
| 11 | know, you **might find one** but in that case one would automatically go. |

| **Extract 4.25** | **Interview 6 Page 9** |
|---|---|
| 1  LIZ: | what I'm trying to say to you is that um if a client is **outright racist** (.) and saying to you |
| 2 | "Don't waste my time, I'm looking for **female. Don't send me anyone else**" ... it is a |
| 3 | judgement call, but it's almost the consultants' judgement call. Well, what do you do? You |
| 4 | know? |

In the extracts above (4.21 – 4.25) the consultants offer definitions of outright racists that allude to 'race' by using the term "blonde" to denote 'white' but explicitly cite gender as part

of the definition (cf. Extract 4.25 Line 1 – 2). Two interpretations concerning this editing of 'race' are elucidated. Consultants are acknowledging the sensitive nature of talk about 'race' and 'racism' in the new South Africa. By not explicitly referring to 'race' in constructing a definition of unreasonable racism, potential accusations of racism are thus avoided. Furthermore the exclusion of 'race' allows consultants to deny that 'race' and therefore racism is an issue in the new South Africa (cf. van Dijk, 1992). Edwards and Potter (1992) argue that this systematic vagueness "provides leverage for initiating a rebuttal" (p. 162). Thus consultants allude to 'white' through the use of "blonde" and assume that the listener is similarly positioned (being defined as 'white') to understand the metaphor. The listener will therefore fill in the (unspoken) blank of 'race' (Barnes et al., 2001).

**Extract 4.26        Interview 3 Page 13**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | HANK: | I mean as I said a lot of our clients are actually **well educated**. That's why when we |
| 2 | | received this fax the other day it bowled us over because lately we have not had to deal with |
| 3 | | it |
| 4 | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 5 | HANK: | so when we do the **hackles rise**. |
| 6 | GERALDINE: | Ja |
| 7 | HANK: | You kind of think, "**where have you been the last few years?**" You know it does ... We'll |
| 8 | | tell them we're not really allowed to do that. I'm not going to report them but I'm letting |
| 9 | | you know |
| 10 | GERALDINE: | Ja |
| 11 | HANK: | that what you have requested – Ja bad dog! Qwadah, qwadah [makes whipping motion with |
| 12 | | hand] |

**Extract 4.27        Interview 5 Page 1**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | GERALDINE: | Okay. So, what kind of things have you noticed now as opposed to previously? |
| 2 | ANDRE: | I would say (.) they are not calling affirmative action positions anymore affirmative action |
| 3 | | they are calling them equity positions. |
| 4 | GERALDINE: | Aah huh |
| 5 | ANDRE: | They would clearly state they are looking for **somebody of colour** but in terms of an equity |
| 6 | | position |
| 7 | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 8 | ANDRE: | Um (.) while **they used to be (.) more blunt** |
| 9 | GERALDINE: | Okay and when you say blunt they would say |
| 10 | ANDRE: | They would say "**I am looking for a white male here because, um (.) my clients are all** |
| 11 | | **farmers and (.) that is what they are used to dealing with** and whatever whatever" |
| 12 | GERALDINE: | Okay. So (.) quite clear and they would specify a race |
| 13 | ANDRE: | Yes |
| 14 | GERALDINE: | in that kind of way. |
| 15 | ANDRE: | But **now race is not being specified all the time**. Don't misquote me there |
| 16 | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 17 | ANDRE: | If there is (.) If there's spoken about the race (.) then they might say to you "**This is not an** |
| 18 | | **equity position**" or they might **not even mention anything** or they. But it doesn't happen |
| 19 | | every time. |

In Extracts 4.21, 4.26 and 4.27 the consultants make use of the past and present in offering a definition of unreasonable racism. They position unreasonable racism as located in the past.

Therefore clients who make racially based requests are judged as out of keeping with the current times where racially based requests are unacceptable. They distance themselves from these requests by constructing themselves as present orientated, where the norms of tolerance and non-racialism prevail.

In Extract 4.21 the use of certain terminology ("horrific", "sinister") implies a moral judgement that these racist requests are reprehensible and abhorrent. The consultant, by translating past explicit requests as racist, implies that those norms are unacceptable in the current circumstances and no longer applies. They are thus able to present themselves as non-racist and displace racism onto the racist and irrational other out-there (Durrheim et al., under review).

The ideals of the Enlightenment advocate rationality and tolerance. Most social psychological definitions of prejudice "include the idea that prejudices are irrational" (Billig et al., 1988: 110) and based on erroneous thinking. Therefore explicit racism is erroneous. The consultants can take the moral high ground and position themselves in the liberal tradition with its emphasis on education and rationality. The consultant draws on this understanding to condemn racists as uneducated and daring people (Extract 4.26). They position themselves as amongst the "well educated" that would not engage in such acts. They distance themselves from these "uneducated" clients by constructing their role as disciplining these animals (Extract 4.26). Those individuals who do "dare" to request blonde and blue eyed candidates are to be chastised and isolated. Consultants thus construct themselves as outside the definition of explicit racism. They are "bowled over"; their "hackles rise" and they get "knocked for a six". In this manner the consultant differentiates their position from that of clients, whom they criticised as uneducated.

Furthermore the current practice of racially based requests is constructed as 'reasonable' through appeals to historical patterns of employment (Extract 4.21 and 4.27) and individual preference (Extract 4.24).

A common strategy in the denial of racism is to accuse anti-racists of intolerance (Durrheim et al., under review; van Dijk, 1992). Through the use of the phrase "not as sinister as, as people make it out to be", the consultant constructs critics of current practices as vindictive

and not seeing things as they are. It is potential critics (like me) who are at fault. Those who make accusations of racism are thus misguided in their thinking (van Dijk, 1992).

The paradox of racism as unusual (Extract 4.21) yet commonplace (Extract 4.23) allows consultants to position themselves as the protectors of civilised norms. By constructing blatant acts of racism as unreasonable and morally reprehensible, they position themselves as non-racist and this leaves them open to expressing racist views and engaging in racist practices (Billig et al., 1988). Through their rejection and condemnation of these requests they lay claim to their own reasonableness and deny racism. This lends support to Durrheim's (2000) claim that "racism is not reproduced at the fringes of society, by lunatics, but at its very centre" (p. 3). In this instance the centre is the private recruitment agencies.

Similarly in the extract that follows the consultant positions themselves in opposition to their client in offering a definition of unreasonable racism:

**Extract 4.28    Interview 5 Page 5**

1  ANDRE:          [inaudible] We were interviewing one lady and she called her (.) [derogatory term –
2                       inaudible as phone rang] or something like that. And **I can't take somebody who actually**
3                       **uses that kind of language** [inaudible] [Answers phone and speaks to client – tape
4                       switched off]
5  ANDRE:          She would not work for somebody who swears [inaudible] uses that kind of language.
6  GERALDINE:                                                                                                    // kind of language
7  ANDRE:          Because that kind of language is **blatant** racism

In offering a definition of unreasonable racism as blatant use of derogatory terms, the consultant can engage in racist practice. According to this definition as long as they do not use derogatory terminology they are not racist!

The metaphor used by many consultants is part of the common place knowledge of what constitutes "outright" racism and hence requires no argument. It immediately identifies the racist for what he or she is – someone who makes explicit and blatant requests for 'white' candidates (using derogatory terminology), whilst not actually specifying 'race'. In defining racism as blatant acts, recruitment consultants are therefore able to exclude themselves as part of the problem (van Dijk, 1993: 8).

## 4.4.2. Casting the blame

"Racism is always *elsewhere*, and always the property of the *others*" (van Dijk, 1992: 109).
In this way recruitment consultants construct themselves as blameless and powerless victims
who are merely meeting clients' unreasonable needs. Part of constructing a definition of
'unreasonable' racism is to locate racism out-there, i.e. external to the self. Thus casting the
blame onto the 'other' assists consultants in distancing themselves from unreasonable racist
practice.

**Extract 4.29     Interview 6 Page 13**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | LIZ: | Hmm. But I also think that clients out there **use the agencies as scapegoats**. Because what |
| 2 | | they are doing is they are saying, "We want a white person for this position. Now if we |
| 3 | | were to run the ads ourselves or do the recruitment ourselves, we **will open ourselves up to** |
| 4 | | **problems** |
| 5 | GERALDINE: | mm |
| 6 | LIZ: | with the public. With the employees out there. That we **could get into trouble** for |
| 7 | | focussing on white candidates only |
| 8 | GERALDINE: | [cough] |
| 9 | LIZ: | But, if we give it to an external organisation to handle our recruitment on our behalf. Um, |
| 10 | | we take the risk away from ourselves. |

**Extract 4.30     Interview 9 Page 12**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | DAVID: | We've had one request for an engineering manager for a black female |
| 2 | GERALDINE: | Mmm, mmm |
| 3 | DAVID: | Engineering managers. Now engineering managers on their own are very difficult to find |
| 4 | | let alone black females because black females (.) most females that I've met recently |
| 5 | | who've studied towards an engineering management degree |
| 6 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 7 | DAVID: | Engineering is just not an aspect that many females explore. Males usually go into that kind |
| 8 | | of thing and study. Um, so that request was very strange for us and we didn't fill that |
| 9 | | position |
| 10 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 11 | DAVID: | because we couldn't find a black female engineering manager. |
| 12 | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 13 | DAVID: | So the requests come in dribs and drabs but sometimes clients will request us and they give |
| 14 | | us [inaudible] because **they know they cannot find that in the market place so hence I've** |
| 15 | | **tried my black A A route now get me something else.** |
| 16 | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 17 | DAVID: | (//) No black person exists in the industry. So what do you want me to do? I've tried. I've |
| 18 | | said A A. **They** cannot deliver the goods so I am going to go with white [inaudible] |
| 19 | GERALDINE: | Mm |
| 20 | DAVID: | or I'm going to go with coloured or I'm going to go with Asian |
| 21 | GERALDINE: | [inaudible] because |
| 22 | DAVID: | They give us **unworkable positions** just so they can say they have given the agency an A A |
| 23 | | position. They can't deliver the goods. They say they can't find the person in XXX so the |
| 24 | | next level would be to find somebody different. Because they know **that there is no** |
| 25 | | **person that exists of that colour** |
| 26 | GERALDINE: | Okay. I hear what you are saying |
| 27 | DAVID: | So once again thing is **passing the buck on** |
| 28 | GERALDINE: | Ja |
| 29 | DAVID: | Because if the person is out there we will find them but if they don't exist they don't exist. |
| 30 | | We can't (.) create them |

In Extract 4.29 the consultant argues that agencies are used as "scapegoats" for clients. The term "scapegoats" constructs the agencies as powerless to do anything about the situation. A variety of "no choice' arguments are created to support this position.

The consultant argues that they are requested to fulfil "unworkable positions" (Extract 4.30 Line 13 – 15). Clients pass "the buck on" and blame the agencies for their inability to obtain employment equity candidates whereas the reality is "that there is no person that exists of that colour". Through this argument they position themselves as powerless (caught between clients' demands and a market that does not have the required candidates). This argument is used to absolve agencies of responsibility for placing candidates using 'racial' criteria. The argue that the subject of scrutiny (and potential judgement) should not be them but their clients who make these requests.

### Extract 4.31    Interview 6 Page 9

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | LIZ: | (Discussing racially based requests and how the recruitment consultant responds to these |
| 2 | | requests). Um, you know again that is a very difficult question, because what do you do? |
| 3 | | You are running a company. Right? **You need to make placements. You need to make** |
| 4 | | **money.** So, if a client says to you um "I'm looking for a white female for that position". |
| 5 | | You, you need to say to yourself, **"Do I say to him I'm sorry I will not just send you** |
| 6 | | **white females, I will send you males and females of all colours that are capable of** |
| 7 | | **doing this position? Do you say that and risk losing that client?** Because, let's face it |
| 8 | | **what that client will do is say: "If you don't want to supply me with the staff, I will go** |
| 9 | | **to another agency"** |
| 10 | GERALDINE: | Hmm, hmm |
| 11 | LIZ: | and you think to yourself, "But I've got the people here. I've got the people that I can put |
| 12 | | into those positions". So, it is very, very difficult and I think coming from a smaller agency, |
| 13 | | rather than a larger agency. Smaller agencies need, they **need** those placements. They |
| 14 | | **cannot be too selective** in turning clients away or not. The bigger agencies can say, "This |
| 15 | | is, this is our policy. Take it or leave it". **It's like how they negotiate rates as well.** |
| 16 | | **These are our rates, you don't want to pay the rates cheers, go to another agency.** |
| 17 | | **Whereas the smaller agencies will say, well these are our rates and the client might say** |
| 18 | | **ooh, then let's negotiate. And you're more prone to negotiate those rates because you** |
| 19 | | **want the business.** |
| 20 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 21 | LIZ: | **You need to survive** |
| 22 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 23 | LIZ: | Whereas big agencies might not. They might not. |

### Extract 4.32    Interview 9 Page 14

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | DAVID: | Mmm (.) Um, it's not a bad thing. The way I see it we're in the business to recruit and |
| 2 | | place people. Um, if I was in the industry and if I was a butcher and someone told me I |
| 3 | | want a lamb chop with no fat on it. I would give them a lamb chop with no fat on it. Um, if |
| 4 | | someone comes to me and says I want a PA who's white with Word, Excel, PowerPoint. |
| 5 | | That is what I'll give them. So in my knowledge I am giving the client, I am seeing to his |
| 6 | | needs. Um, which is what I am being paid to do at the end of the day and that is why I am |
| 7 | | here |
| 8 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 9 | DAVID: | It's to generate money for the company and to provide my client with what he **needs**. |

| 10 | GERALDINE: | Mmm, mmm |
| 11 | DAVID: | I'm not being disloyal. I am not embarrassed to say that we <u>are</u> doing what our clients are |
| 12 | | asking us to do. It's **just** that **we are in the business to suit their needs**. |
| 13 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 14 | DAVID: | So <u>we</u> can't challenge them. **We are not in a position to challenge**. |
| 15 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 16 | DAVID: | We are not in a power position at all. <u>They</u> hold the key. And if <u>they</u>, we challenge them |
| 17 | | [inaudible] then they'll give us [inaudible] |
| 18 | GERALDINE: | <u>Mmm</u>, <u>mmm</u> |
| 19 | DAVID: | So **it's about money**. It boils down to giving **good customer service** |
| 20 | GERALDINE: | Ja. Okay and also [inaudible] your clients' requirements |
| 21 | DAVID: | Absolutely |
| 22 | GERALDINE: | the service that they, that they want. And the only way to do that is if you [inaudible] |
| 23 | | otherwise they will take their business elsewhere |
| 24 | DAVID: | They will. And it is so easy to do that. You go through the Yellow Pages [inaudible] XXX |
| 25 | | is challenges us all the time and saying "See this person". I don't want to see that person. |
| 26 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 27 | DAVID: | The person who gives them five people who are meeting my requirements [inaudible] |
| 28 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 29 | DAVID: | and I'll go back to that [inaudible] |

A number of rhetorical manoeuvres are used. Consultants are "running a company" the purpose of which is to make money. They construct fulfilling racially based requests as a "need" in order "to survive". The client is viewed as threatening and using their power to coerce recruitment agencies into engaging in these illegal practices. Racially based placements become a matter of "survival", of life and death. Consultants put forward the 'no choice' argument – they "cannot be too selective" if they want to their business to be profitable and to continue. In this way they blame clients for putting them in these positions and deny that their practices are racist.

The use of active voicing (or quoted speech) by the consultant throughout the conversation is used to establish the factuality of this claim (Potter, 1996: 161). Through this talk consultants construct racially based practices as a matter of survival. It is understandable and reasonable in the current circumstances. They place blame out-there for if clients did not make such requests, they would not need to respond to them.

The consultant justifies their practice by trivialising clients' racially based requests (cf. Durrheim et al., under review). In Extract 4.31 this is done by comparing racially based requests to negotiating rates with clients "because you want the business". In Extract 4.32 this is done through the use of an analogy. The analogy constructed is of a butcher supplying customers with lamb chops with no fat on it. Meeting the clients' request for a 'white' candidate is much like giving a customer who has requested, "a lamb chop with no fat on it

… a lamb chop with no fat on it". The consultant distances themselves from potential accusations of racism by constructing their practice as neutral and by locating blame out there.

The client is constructed as powerful, because "they hold the key" and the recruitment agency as powerless in the face of these requests. If they do not meet clients' requirements they will "take their business elsewhere". This transfer manoeuvre is a common rhetorical device used to normalise racist practice (van Dijk, 1992). Everybody is doing it (recruiting and selecting using clients' racially based requests) so why shouldn't I! They are forced to respond because of what the client is doing out-there.

However, the consultant minimises the recruitment and selection of candidates according to 'racial' criteria by the use of words such as: "just" meeting the clients "needs". That is "giving good customer service" is about suiting these racially based needs. Racially based recruitment and selection is de-racialised by referring to these requests as reasonable "needs". Fulfilling clients' apparently reasonable but racist needs is interpreted as good customer service and thus justifiable despite their repugnance. They position their practice as simply good business practice and therefore non-racist.

### 4.4.3. Reasonable racism

A further rhetorical strategy in the denial of racism is to construct racially based requests as reasonable. This is in contrast to the construction of clients as unreasonable and racist (as has been highlighted in section 4.41). These contradictory ways of talking about racism (and clients) can be used to accomplish different functions (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 71). During this time of transition, the construction of racially based requests as reasonable excuses clients (and consultants).

In the extracts that follow consultants argue for the reasonable nature of requests using 'racial' criteria:

### Extract 4.33    Interview 1 Page 15

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | CRAIG: | So (.) um but when they have to say to you they actually are looking for a white person they do get a bit nervous. I have another client who specifically requests white managers |
| 2 | | |
| 3 | GERALDINE: | Okay |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 4 | CRAIG: | For (.) um (.) it's a butchery |
| 5 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 6 | CRAIG: | Um (.) in (.) in. uhh (.) the sort of XXX region. |
| 7 | GERALDINE: | Mmm, mmm |
| 8 | CRAIG: | Different. He's got different butcheries. The **reason he asks for white though is for** |
| 9 | | **another reason**. The butcheries are in a predominantly black area. |
| 10 | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 11 | CRAIG: | And he says that **unfortunately** (.) um to employ a black manager in a black butchery that |
| 12 | | caters to **black people** (.) they **are intimidated very easily**. He doesn't want an Indian or a |
| 13 | | black because he says they are **intimidated to easily**. That is why he's requested white |
| 14 | | male managers, not females. |
| 15 | GERALDINE: | Okay. Intimidate by customers or by ? |
| 16 | CRAIG: | Because there's a lot of violence and stuff in the areas where they are. Um (.) so they tend to |
| 17 | | be quite intimidated, ja. |
| 18 | GERALDINE: | About people in that particular |
| 19 | CRAIG: | (///) in that particular area. Um, people who come in there. Perhaps having |
| 20 | | had too much to drink or (.) **you know** there's been within his organisation um (.) there |
| 21 | | have been many armed robberies. Um. And because of that he says that he **prefers** to have |
| 22 | | **white males**. Because they're **not intimidated**. |
| 23 | GERALDINE: | Okay, Hmm, ja, okay. I just had a little vision of them toting guns, if he's concerned about |
| 24 | | security |
| 25 | CRAIG: | Ja, no. He has security. Um. The firms with guards and stuff like that but he **prefers** to |
| 26 | | employ white males because of that **reason. That is purely the reason. Not a** (.) **not** |
| 27 | | **anything else** (.) **uh** but because he (.) they sell to the black industry. |
| 28 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 29 | CRAIG: | **They are always in a fairly** (.) **not a nice area**. The butcheries are generally situated in |
| 30 | | **many not nice areas** and um (.) he feels (.) he feels. **This is from experience that he has** |
| 31 | | **actually had problems with Indian and black managers**. |
| 32 | GERALDINE: | Mmm, mm. Would he say to you what the kinda problems were that he had or did he just |
| 33 | | kinda say he had problems? |
| 34 | CRAIG: | No. He just said to me "I've had problems with intimidation. Uhh (.) in (.) in the butchery |
| 35 | | (.) with (.) um Indians and black managers and I therefore only want white applicants." |

| | **Extract 4.34** | **Interview 6 Page 8** |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | GERALDINE: | … Do you ever have you ever had instances, because I know that a number of agencies I |
| 2 | | have spoken to have said that they do, where people don't say they want an affirmative |
| 3 | | action candidate, what they do say is "I want a white candidate"? |
| 4 | LIZ: | Um, shew Geraldine that's a, **that's a very difficult one** because I think part of our role |
| 5 | | here is to, is to kind of educate your client as well. |
| 6 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 7 | LIZ: | **But you do have that.** Um (.) you do have situations where the client will say to you (.) um |
| 8 | | (.) I (.) **but** (.) but as much as they will say I want a **white candidate** they will say I want |
| 9 | | and **Indian lady** for this position, or I want a **black** |
| 10 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 11 | LIZ: | lady for this position. Um (.) and I think (.) I find that **I try to understand where they are** |
| 12 | | **coming from** |
| 13 | GERALDINE: | Uhhm |
| 14 | LIZ: | that request, because um (.) as much as I try and say to them "Now hang on a second, you |
| 15 | | know you um should be looking for at best person for the position, whether they are black, |
| 16 | | white or anything else, coloured, Indian" Um (.) often you might find that they (.) the |
| 17 | | person will be working in a specific environment. Alright? Let's say [clears throat] you |
| 18 | | have an environment where there are all (.) **black males or** (.) **Indian males** for example. |
| 19 | | That they find maybe they could be **intimidating for a white female** to work in that, in that |
| 20 | | environment. That maybe a **male** per se would be, would be aah **more suitable** because of |
| 21 | | the **environment**. What I try and do is I try and find out what is the **reason** behind your |
| 22 | | requiring a specific individual of (.) sex or race or whatever. |

The consultants thus construct racially based requests as 'reasonable' (Extract 4.33 and 4.34). The consultants argue that "reason" for requesting 'whites' has nothing to do with racism. In Extract 4.33 requesting 'white' managers is "for another reason ... and this is ... purely the reason. Not a (.) not anything else". Through these phrases the consultant acknowledges the potential for accusations of racism to be laid at the door of their client (and their own in fulfilling this request) and mounts an argument for the 'reasonable' nature of such requests. The reason posited for what may seem like racism is the environmental working conditions (cf. Extract 4.34 also for an argument concerning 'place') and because 'black' people are intimidated; a character flaw that they can unfortunately do nothing about. Furthermore the construction of 'black' space as "not a nice area" assists in their argument of 'black' as inferior (cf. Durrheim et al., 2001a).

The reason clients' request 'white' managers are because 'black' and 'Indian' people "are intimidated very easily" (Extract 4.33 Line 12). It is "unfortunately" 'black' personality failing that is the cause for this racially based request. The use of "unfortunate" constructs the client as wishing things was different to how they are. The consultant constructs their racist attitudes as a lack of choice. Clients' are forced to make these requests because of how 'they' (i.e. 'blacks') are.

Knowledge or truth claims concerning the nature of 'black' and 'Indian' people are made by citing a subjective experience as a generalisable, objective reality, which is difficult to refute or challenge (cf. Edwards, 1997). They construct their client as motivated by non-racism thus avoiding challenges in fulfilling their requests.

Similarly in Extract 4.34 the 'reason' given for placing candidates using 'racial' criteria is not for racist reasons but because of the environment in which they are required to work (Line 16 – 22). The consultant acknowledges both the sensitive nature of discussing 'race' in South Africa and their practice of recruiting candidates using 'racial' criteria. The consultant attempts to normalise these 'racially' based requests by arguing that other 'races' (not only 'white') are requested. They appeal to stereotypical conceptualisations of 'black' men and 'white' women in constructing an argument for the 'reasonable' nature of the requests whilst arguing that 'race' is irrelevant in recruitment and selection. Namely that a 'white' woman would find it intimidating to work in an environment where there are only 'black' or 'Indian' males. It is possible that they used this example because I (as social scientist researcher)

would be constructed as a 'white' female. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, the emphasis is on gender rather than 'race' in their argument for clients' requests as 'reasonable'.

**Extract 4.35**  **Interview 2 Page 5**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | GERALDINE: | And how do you, how would you handle something like that (racially based request)? |
| 2 | PATRICK: | Well, first of all I think when you get into a situation like that the only way to handle it is to |
| 3 | | ask them a question. |
| 4 | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 5 | PATRICK: | To find out where it's coming from, because there might actually be **a valid reason. And** |
| 6 | | **then it's not illegal**. |
| 7 | GERALDINE: | Okay |
| 8 | PATRICK: | It isn't illegal for instance, than to say for instance pick on age group. There might be |
| 9 | | certain categories, to put a black person in that position. In the sense that (a) they wouldn't |
| 10 | | have the **qualification** probably – **historically**, or they might **not be capable** for that job. |
| 11 | | **There are always reasons.** |
| 12 | GERALDINE: | Aah, okay |
| 13 | PATRICK: | for not |
| 14 | GERALDINE: | Alright, so you would obviously find out what the reasons for people wanting the |
| 15 | PATRICK: | It's usually prejudice [laughs] |
| 16 | GERALDINE: | [laughs] Okay |
| 17 | | [Both laugh] |

In Extract 4.35 the consultant argues that there are always reasons for racially based requests (cf. Sears, 1988 on symbolic racism). They act as a judge and final arbiter of reasonableness and construct the guidelines concerning what constitutes "valid reasons", namely lack of qualifications and incapacity on the part of "a black person". However, variation in their talk is found when they later construct these 'reasonable' requests as "usually prejudice". This functions to distance consultants from potential accusations of racism by identifying the racist. It is only those who are rational and reasonable who can identify racism.

**Extract 4.36**  **Interview 1 Page 10**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | CRAIG: | ... If I had had a black (.) a white candidate or three white candidates and three black |
| 2 | | candidates I can guarantee you now that I probably would have put the three white |
| 3 | | candidates forward. |
| 4 | GERALDINE: | Uh mm |
| 5 | CRAIG: | **Not (.) not for any other reason but because that is what my client required.** |
| 6 | GERALDINE: | Uh hmm. And, um what do think of this? Obviously there is a financial consequence to |
| 7 | | not, to not basically providing the client with what they want |
| 8 | CRAIG: | (//) what they want. That is the reason why I |
| 9 | | have to do that. Because I am in business. I am in business to give a **service to my clients**. |
| 10 | GERALDINE: | Mmm |
| 11 | CRAIG: | Like anyone else. **A service is, is giving a client what their (.) what they require** |

**Extract 4.37**  **Interview 11 Page 1**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | SARAH: | Uh, with a lot of the medium to small size [inaudible] especially with the small companies |
| 2 | | (.) Um, I must say we, we still do get a clients saying, "**Well I prefer a white female**" |
| 3 | GERALDINE: | Hmm |
| 4 | SARAH: | or "**I prefer a white male**" or "I don't want to look at an Asian or a black person because |
| 5 | | I've had a **bad experience with them** before". |

**Extract 4.38     Interview 11 Page 2 – 3**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | SARAH: | Some clients don't say that they don't want a non-white person, but when you send CV's |
| 2 | | you, you can gather by the people they choose to see what their race **preference** is. |
| 3 | GERALDINE: | Ja |
| 4 | SARAH: | Because you might send really good candidates and they might choose to only see the white |
| 5 | | candidates. But they won't turn around and say to you, "Well we're looking for white |
| 6 | | persons". Just by the way **they choose** to see people you can |
| 7 | GERALDINE: | Ja |
| 8 | SARAH: | this is what their **preference** is. Um, but we don't really fuss much you know with clients |
| 9 | | like that. |

Racially based recruitment and selection is de-racialised and re-conceptualised as providing a "service" (Extract 4.36) and is based on individual "preference" and choice (Extract 4.37 and 4.38). Goldberg (1998) argues that it is this notion of individual preference that is used to justify and protect segregated areas. The function of this talk is therefore to conserve historical patterns, de-racialise racist talk as preference, and to locate racism within the individual.

The consultant constructs herself as passive and engages in several defences of racist practice. They defend themselves by shifting blame to clients. They utilise a number of arguments in this: that they are in a business to make money; that they are powerless to refuse clients; that they have no choice; that they are "servicing" clients' needs and requirements; that it is the clients "preference" and not theirs and therefore they are not engaging in racist practice.

Unreasonable racism is thus defined in empiricist terms that refer to explicit acts or types of talk. Racists are accused of being irrational, erroneous in their thinking and unreasonable individuals. The moral superiority or the recruitment consultant empowers them to identify these racists (Extract 4.9). The denial of racism plays a prominent role in the reproduction of racism. It is difficult to challenge racism when the dominant consensus is that it does not exist or is a "reasonable" response to current circumstances. Resistance to racism is therefore not taken seriously and when it is acknowledged is treated as a deviation that should be punished at an individual level. In examining the talk of recruitment consultants a more mixed and contradictory discourse exists, which is more difficult to challenge directly as racist (Goldberg, 1998: 23; van Dijk, 1992; Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 175).

## 4.5. Conclusion

The analysis has highlighted the dilemma recruitment consultants think and argue through when clients request candidates utilising 'racial' criteria in a context that advocates tolerance and forbids "unfair discrimination". As a number of researchers have argued (Billig, 1987; Potter and Wetherell, 1987 and 1988; van Dijk, 1992; Wetherell and Potter, 1992) people draw on rhetoric to legitimise and justify certain practices. The analysis has examined the rhetorical manoeuvres consultants use in attempting to distance themselves from racist inferences whilst supplying clients with candidates utilising these 'racial' criteria.

In their construction of 'white' as the norm and 'black' as deficient in terms of skills, qualifications and personality they justify their current racist practices and the failure within many organisations to meet employment equity requirements. The construction of 'white' as the norm and 'black' as deficient is a necessary condition for justifying 'racial' preference in a context that forbids "unfair discrimination". For if 'black' is deficient in terms of skills, qualifications and personality, what right-minded business person would recruit 'black' people? In this way the victim of racism is held accountable for their continued oppression and those that reproduce it are overlooked. Through 'white' and 'black' rhetoric, consultants reproduce patterns of employment designed to conserve the historical status quo.

However, the consultants need to negotiate potential accusations of racism. Splitting racism into 'unreasonable and reasonable' racism does this. Consultants construct 'unreasonable' racism as blatant, derogatory talk and behaviour that is located externally (clients do this) and in the past. These rhetorical manoeuvres position consultants within the moral community of the unprejudiced (Billig, 1988). However, variation in consultants talk can be found as they accuse and excuse clients racially based requests. They argue that their clients and their practices are "reasonable' due to natural differences between 'races'. The conservation of the 'racial' hierarchy is argued for by constructing 'white' as the norm (and implicitly meeting the required standard) and 'black' as merely a requirement and deficient in terms of qualifications, experience and personality. 'Blacks', the victims of racism, are constructed as being agents of their own position in society. Thus 'black' failing is used to justify the construction of 'racial' privilege. By casting the blame out there – it is the clients' who are racist (although not all the time) and the 'blacks' that are deficient – consultants draw attention away from their practice and counter accusations of racism.

Although the analysis did examine the shifting nature of 'racial' talk and the use of alternative terminology (such as 'culture') to talk about 'race', further work on the use of 'affirmative action' is required.

This analysis provides a preliminary understanding of the reproduction of racism within the private recruitment industry. The analysis highlights that not only do racist practices persist in the new South Africa, but that consultants draw on a number of rhetorical strategies, which justify and conserves historical patterns in the employment sector.

How people talk about 'race' in South Africa is shifting and it is therefore important to examine the rhetorical strategies utilised rather than focus on the content of talk. In merely focussing on the content of talk we encounter difficulties in establishing the existence of racism. This can be seen in the recent Human Rights Commission investigation into racism in the media where allegations of racism were denied due to a definition of racism as explicit acts using empiricist criteria. During this time of transition, recruitment consultants speak with the knowledge of the illegal nature of racist talk and engage in rhetorical strategies to deny and counter potential allegations of racism. It was therefore important to elucidate the rhetorical strategies employed by consultants, which allow for the conservation and reproduction of the status quo.

# 5. Concluding Comments

## 5.1. Introduction

This chapter locates the analysis of private recruitment consultant's discourse within a broader framework of discursive 'race' research. The current analysis elucidates the common rhetorical strategies employed in 'race' talk across a variety of contexts and the efficacy of discourse analysis as a methodology. The 'findings' of this study serve as a platform for recommendations concerning the private recruitment industry and are offered as one way of combating racism. As a qualitative researcher I have conceptualised this study as a "work in progress" and there are areas of talk and text that have not been subjected to my analytic gaze and the analysis is poorer for this. These areas will be highlighted and suggestions offered for future discursive 'race' research in South Africa.

## 5.2. 'Race' Attitudes, Resistance and the Private Recruitment Industry

Discursive studies of racism have defined racism in terms of the ideological effects and conceptualised racism as a field of discourse (Billig, 1988; Durrheim, 1997; Goldberg, 1990; Wetherell and Potter, 1992) rather than focussing on a predefined content of racism. This is based on the assumption that speakers draw on "flexible, localized styles of arguing and thinking" (Durrheim and Dixon, 2001a: 448) that perform various functions depending on the context the speaker is in (Potter and Wetherell, 1987 and 1994; Wetherell and Potter, 1988). The rhetorical strategies employed by consultants (re)produce and conserve the 'racial' hierarchy and historical 'racial' privilege afforded those who meet the required standards (Goldberg, 1998) despite legislation that sanctions "unfair discrimination". Recruitment consultants construct an argument for their practice (and those of their clients') as 'reasonable' in the current circumstances.

I have highlighted two of the rhetorical strategies employed by private recruitment consultants in their conversations about 'race' and employment equity in South Africa, namely the construction of 'white' as the norm and 'black' as a requirement and deficient; and the denial of racism.

The contradictory ways of talking about 'white', 'black', employment equity and changes in the recruitment industry over the last decade suggests that attitudes are not internal states that are consistently reproduced on demand. The analysis highlights how during this time of socio-political transformation consultants speak with an awareness of the norm of tolerance and the moral condemnation of racists that prevail in society. Thus talk reflects their awareness of the norm of tolerance and non-racism as a legal and social requirement. Consultants draw on a number of rhetorical strategies to position themselves as 'reasonably' racist (if not non-racist). Variation in consultants talk is therefore expected and reflects the shifting functions of their talk, namely to position themselves as non-racist whilst justifying clients' racist requests and their racist rhetoric.

Resistance to employment equity can be seen in examining the latest employment equity statistics and survey results for the private sector. Resistance to transformation of the private sector is negotiated through a third party, namely the private recruitment agency. Clients thus make requests using 'racial' criteria and the onus is on private recruitment agencies to negotiate these requests. The analysis highlights the rhetorical strategies employed by consultants in thinking through and responding to this dilemma.

South African discursive research has focussed on the object of racism rather than examination of the subject. The analysis provides a preliminary understanding of the subject by examining the construction of 'whiteness' amongst private recruitment consultants. The construction of 'white' within the private recruitment industry is used to justify, legitimise and conserve the historical 'racial' hierarchy and the accompanying 'racial' privilege awarded to those who meet the required standards. Further research on the construction of 'white' is required within South African psychology.

The analysis contributes to previous discursive research that has elucidated the splitting of racism into 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable' racism (cf. Billig, 1996; Durrheim et al. under review). Private recruitment consultants argue that their practice of recruiting and selecting using 'racial' criteria is 'reasonable' and therefore rational. They position themselves (and their clients) as 'reasonably' racist by defining racism as explicit, derogatory talk that is externally located and is in the past. This argument is assisted by the construction of 'white' as the norm and 'black' as deficient. The construction of 'black' as deficient occurred despite social and political sanctioning.

Consultants engaged in rhetorical manoeuvres to successfully negotiate and distance themselves from potential accusations of racism in their denigration of 'blacks'. The construction of 'white' and 'black' is used to legitimise the recruitment and selection of candidates using 'racial' criteria and serves as a platform for justifying 'racial' privilege and an hierarchy whilst countering potential allegations of racism and positioning themselves as non-racist. In this manner 'blacks', the victims of racism, are held accountable for their current employment status. Discursive researchers have highlighted how 'blaming the victim' is a common rhetorical strategy in the denial of racism (cf. Duncan, 1996; Durrheim et al, under review; Stevens, 1998; van Dijk, 1992). As long as South African discursive researchers continue to ignore the construction of 'white', we will fail to adequately explicate how racism is (re)produced in a context that forbids it.

## 5.3. Recommendations

The following recommendations are forwarded, based on findings and observations in gather talk and text from private recruitment consultants:

- A number of consultants expressed concern that their agency (and themselves) would be exposed as racist; they felt disloyal to the industry in talking about their practices; and they feared that clients would move to another agency if they did not meet racially based requests. These concerns need to be acknowledged and addressed. However, this does not mean that such practices should not come under public scrutiny or debate. If we are serious about building non-racism, then such practices must be exposed and debated in the public arena. The Equity Courts set out in the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, 2000 and the South African Human Rights Commission, could initiate and sustain this debate. It is therefore recommended that audits of all agencies are conducted to ensure that all agencies are doing the same thing in terms of recruitment and selection and to prevent clients' from making racially based requests.

- No evidence could be found that recruitment agencies were engaging in blatant advocacy of 'racial' hatred. Many recruitment agencies reported their condemnation of clients' racially based requests. However, some agencies displayed a limited knowledge of employment equity legislation. It is

recommended that APSO and individual recruitment agencies conduct regular workshops on the impact of Employment Equity Act, 1998 and Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, 2000 that prohibits racism and promotes the equality and dignity of all humans.

- The private recruitment industry engages in racist practice by responding to clients racially based requests and thus reproduces racism (consciously or unconsciously). Furthermore stereotypical constructions of 'black' and 'white' assist in the conservation of historical employment patterns. Although a number of recruitment agencies were aware of the legislation I would urge APSO to offer racism awareness training for recruitment consultants alongside the labour legislation training that is already on offer. Private recruitment agencies should be encouraged to organise discussions to sensitise consultants to the manner in which racism exists within their industry. Such discussions could potentially examine how the consultancy and recruitment industry are choosing to respond to clients racially based requests and whether such responses are appropriate.

- It would appear that there are few mechanisms in place to monitor racism in the private recruitment industry. Participation in professional organisations such as APSO, which outlines a professional code of conduct for private recruitment agencies, is voluntary. Registration of private recruitment agencies is no longer required since the repeal of the Guidance and Placement Act, 1981. It is recommended that APSO and the Department of Labour liase with each other in establishing a regulatory framework and independent regulatory authority to monitor racism in the private recruitment industry. Furthermore that the industry develops a Code of Conduct that includes how to respond to clients racially based requests but should not be confined to it.

- Most of the recruitment agencies that participated in this study did not appear to reflect the demographics of this country as required by the Employment Equity Act, 1998. It is recommended that agencies address the issue of training and recruitment of 'black' staff and that this is monitored by the Department of Labour.

## 5.4. Limitations of this Study

At the time of writing up the research the Employment Equity Act (1998) has been in effect for nearly four years. However when I first commenced the interviews this legislation was only two years old and many companies had not established Employment Equity plans as required by the Act. I am uncertain as to how this extended time frame in collecting conversations impacted on the talk of recruitment consultants. Furthermore the Promotion of Equality Act (2000) was still in draft form when I commenced this study and it is only in more recent interviews that the consultants indicated knowledge of this legislation.

Gaining access to recruitment consultants was a difficult task, more difficult than I had initially envisaged. At some point in the study I reached saturation point – I decided to stop looking for more participants. At this stage I had made contact with over one hundred recruitment agencies in two urban areas. The consequence is that only nine of the eleven interviews are included in the data analysis. This number is not regarded as a sufficiently large enough sample for the generalisibility of findings. However, the contextual nature of interpretive research usually places strong limits on the generalisibility of findings. Discursive researchers do not claim to have 'discovered' the truth. Rather they make truth claims, out of a myriad of possible positions. This research is no different in this regard. The findings I put forward are open to challenges and are contestable.

Despite the limited sample size, the ambivalence in consultants and my talk about employment equity may be a feature beyond the context of private recruitment. This claim is informed by my 'whiteness' and thus being privy to 'white' employment equity talk. It is also informed by the literature that suggests that modern 'race' talk is ambivalent (Barker, 1981; Billig, 1988; Goldberg, 1998; van Dijk, 1992; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Conversationalists both deny racism whilst reproducing it. Accessing a larger sample and drawing on people in the private sector (not just private recruitment agencies) could assist in developing an understanding of this ambivalence towards employment equity.

Although every effort was made to access different sized agencies, many of the larger national agencies refused to participate in this study. In conversation with recruitment consultants, what became evident was that agencies operate in different ways and talk about employment equity in varying ways. In part this variation is informed by whether the agency

is part of a national chain or a small, local business. A larger and more stratified sample (in terms of agency size) could have highlighted variation in talk amongst recruitment consultants and enriched our understanding of private recruitment and selection.

Generally the research into employment equity has tended to be descriptive rather than explanatory and has highlighted resistance to employment equity, especially amongst 'whites'. During the interviews and whilst analysing the data I chose to ignore a number of themes that began to emerge. For example how recruitment consultants spoke about and constructed employment equity. Although briefly elucidated in my analysis, how this resistance functions in day-to-day business requires further explication. It may be useful to revisit the conversations I have accessed and also include the talk of others involved in the recruitment and selection of candidates.

The conversation recruitment consultants and I embarked on was open-ended and the outcome unknown. However, there was a tension in conducting interviews. I had specific areas that I wished to cover, guided by my interview schedule. At the same time recruitment consultants resisted engaging in talk about certain topics – during the interviews and in their refusal to participate in the study. Resistance to employment equity is described in surveys (cf. Deloitte & Touché Human Capital, 2001; Schlemmer, 2001). Although this study attempts to explicate this resistance, further work is required. Naturally occurring conversations around employment equity could provide us with interesting data and elucidate this resistance further. Researcher would have to negotiate a minefield of ethical dilemmas, particularly around the issue of informed consent. Despite this future studies could pay close attention to these manoeuvres and may provide us with further insight into how to resist racism.

In reviewing statistics what became evident was that no comprehensive data-base exists concerning the implementation of employment equity. This legislation is over four years old and the issue has been on the table since 1994. This made it difficult to establish the efficacy of employment equity in the private sector. From the limited data available, it would appear that employment equity has not been as successfully implemented in the private sector as is claimed. However a comprehensive national data base maintained by the Department of Labour is required to establish this.

The inclusion of 'non-white' recruitment consultants in this study has not been specifically analysed and their talk has formed part of the overall analysis. Perhaps more detailed investigation into this aspect of talk and the rhetorical strategies used by 'Indian' and 'coloured' speakers to convey racist sentiments about 'blacks' could be performed in the future. This may provide us with a more detailed understanding of 'racial' talk within the South African context.

## 5.5. Conclusion

The aim of analysis of private recruitment agencies is to show how, despite a shift in labour legislation, the rhetoric of exclusion and the conservation of these historical patterns of employment persist.

The analysis has refined my understanding of the social construction of 'racial' hierarchy and privilege within employment in South Africa. 'Racial' hierarchy is (re)produced through the construction of 'white' as the norm and 'black' as a requirement and deficient. This construction of 'races' is accompanied by the denial of racism, which functions to counter potential accusations of racism. The analysis of private recruitment consultants' discourse suggests that the rhetorical strategies employed to justify 'racial' privilege and deny racism are responsive to contextual shifts.

# References

Appiah. K.A. (1990) Racisms. In D.T. Goldberg (ed.) The Anatomy of Racism. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Bakhtin, M.M. (1988) The Problem of Speech Genres. In C. Emerson, and M. Holquist (eds.) Speech Genres and Other Late Essays. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bannister. P., Burman, E., Parker, I., Taylor, M., and Lindall, C. (1995) Qualitative Research. In P. Bannister, E. Burman, I. Parker, M. Taylor, and C. Lindall (eds.) Qualitative Methods in Psychology. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Barker. M. (1990) Biology and the New Racism. In D.T. Goldberg (ed.) The Anatomy of Racism. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Barker. M. (1981) The New Racism: Conservatives and the Ideology of the Tribe. London: Junction Books.

Barnes. B., Palmary, I., and Durrheim, K. (2001) The Denial of Racism: The Role of Humor. Personal Experience, and Self-Censorship. Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 20 (3): 321 – 338.

Billig. M. (1999) Whose terms? Whose ordinariness? Rhetoric and Ideology in Conversation Analysis. Discourse & Society, 10 (4): 543 – 582.

Billig. M. (1996) Arguing and Thinking. (New edition) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Billig, M. (1988) The notion of 'prejudice': some rhetorical and ideological aspects. Text, 8: 91 – 110.

Billig, M., Condor, S., Edwards, D., Gane, M., Middleton, D., and Radley, A. (eds.) (1988) Ideological Dilemmas: A social psychology of everyday thinking London: Sage.

Bornman, E. and Appelgryn, A.E.M. (1999) Predictors of ethnic identification in a transitionary South Africa. South African Journal Of Psychology, 29 (2): 62 – 71

Braungart, R.G. and Braungart, M.M. (1995) Black and White South African University Students' Perceptions of Self and Country: An exploratory study. South African Journal of Sociology, 26 (3): 77 – 87.

Business Times Reporter (2002, July 7). Men still rule the roost in upper echelons. Sunday Times Business Times, p.2.

Central Statistical Services (1997) Census of Professional and Business Services 1993: Employment Placement Agencies, Recruitment Organisations and Labour Broker's Services. CSS Report No. 88-07-01 (1993) Pretoria: Central Statistical Services.

Central Statistical Services (1988) Statistical News Release: Census of Employment Placement Agencies, Recruitment Organisations and Labour Broker's Services, 1987. Pretoria: Central Statistical Services.

Condor, S. (1988) 'Race Stereotypes' and racist discourse. Text, 8: 69 – 89.

I

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1993), Constitution of the Republic of South Africa No. 200 of 1993, Government Gazette, 370 (17090). Pretoria.

Cooper, C., Hamilton, R., Mashabela, H., MacKay, S., Sidiropoulos, E., Gordon-Brown, C., Murphy, S., Finelinghaus, J. (1994) Race Relations 1993/94. Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations.

Cooper, C., Schindler, J., McCaul, C., Hamilton, R., Beale, M., Clemans, A., Kruger, L.M., Markovitz, M., Seimon, J.M, Brouard, P., and Shelton, G. (1988) Race Relations Survey 1987/88. Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations.

Crankshaw, O. (1997) Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour Under Apartheid. London: Routledge.

Deloitte & Touché Human Capital Corporation (unpublished) Special Survey on Employment Equity, 2001.

Department of Labour (1998) National Baseline Survey 1998. Pretoria: Department of Labour.

Department of Manpower (1987) National Manpower Commission Placement Services in the RSA. Pretoria: Department of Manpower.

Dixon, J.A., Foster, D.H., Durrheim, K., and Wilbraham, L. (1994) Discourse and the Politics of Space in South Africa: The 'Squatter Crisis'. Discourse & Society, 5 (3): 277 – 296.

Duckitt, J. (1994) Conformity to Social Pressure and Racial Prejudice Among White South Africans. Genetic, Social and General Psychology Monographs, 120: 121 – 143.

Duckitt, J. (1993a) Further validation of a subtle racism scale in South Africa. South African Journal of Psychology, 23 (3): 116 – 119.

Duckitt, J. (1993b) Right-Wing Authoritarianism Among White South African Students: Its Measurement and Correlates. Journal of Social Psychology, 133 (4): 553 – 563.

Duckitt, J. (1992) Patterns of Prejudice: Group interests and Intergroup attitudes. South African Journal Of Psychology, 22 (3): 147 – 156

Duckitt, K. (1991) Prejudice and Racism. In D. Foster and J. Louw-Potgieter (eds.) Social Psychology in South Africa. Johannesburg: Lexicon.

Duckitt, J. (1991) The development and validation of a subtle racism scale in South Africa. South African Journal of Psychology, 21 (4): 233 – 239.

Duckitt, J. (1988) Normative Conformity and Racial Prejudice in South Africa. Genetic, Social and General Psychology Monographs, 114: 415 – 437

Duckitt, J. and Farre, B. (1994) Right Wing Authoritarianism and Political Intolerance Among Whites in the Future Majority – Rule South Africa. The Journal of Social Psychology, 134 (6): 735 – 741.

Duckitt, J., and Foster, D. (1991) Introduction to the special issue: race, social attitudes, and prejudice. South African Journal of Psychology, 21 (4): 199 – 202.

Duckitt, J. and Mphuthing, T (1998) Group Identification and Intergroup Attitudes: A Longitudinal Analysis in South Africa. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74 (1): 80 – 85

Duncan, N. (1996) Discourse on public violence and the reproduction of racism. South African Journal of Psychology, 26 (3): 172 – 182.

Durrheim, K. (2000) Racism in the private and public sphere. Research Review, 15: 3 – 4.

Durrheim, K. (1997) Cognition and Ideology: A rhetorical approach to critical theory. Theory and Psychology, 7 (6): 747 – 768.

Durrheim, K., Quayle, M., Whitehead, K., and Kriel, A. (under review) Denying racism: Discursive Strategies used by the South African Media.

Durrheim, K. and Dixon, J. (2001)a The role of place and metaphor in racial exclusion: South Africa's beaches as sites of shifting racialisation. Ethnic and Racial Studies, 24 (3): 433 – 450.

Durrheim, K. and Dixon, J. (2001)b Theories of culture in racist discourse. Race & Society, 3 : 1 – 16.

Durrheim, K. and Wassenaar, D. (1999) Putting design into practice: writing and evaluating research proposals. In M. Terre Blanche and K. Durrheim (eds.) Research in Practice. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

Durrheim, K. and Foster, D. (1997) Tolerance of ambiguity as a content specific construct. Personality and Individual Differences. 22: 741 – 750.

l

Edwards, D. (2000) Analyzing Racial Discourse: A View from Discursive Psychology. In H. Van den Berg, H. Houtcoup, and M. Wetherell (eds.) Analysing interviews on racial issues. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Edwards, D. (1997) Discourse and Cognition. London: Sage.

Edwards, D., and Potter, J. (1992) Discursive Psychology. London: Sage.

Emmanuel, E.J., Wendler, D., Grady, C. (2000) What makes Clinical Research Ethical? Journal of American Medical Association, 283 (20): 2701 – 2711.

Employment Equity Act (1998). Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998. Government Gazette, 413 (20626). Pretoria.

Finchilescu, G. and Dawes, A. (1998) Catapulted into democracy: South African Adolescents' Sociopolitical orientations following rapid social change. Journal of Social Issues, 54 (3): 563 – 583.

Fitzpatrick, P. (1990) Racism and the Innocence of Law. In D.T. Goldberg (ed.) Anatomy of Racism. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Forgey, H., Dimant, T., Corrigan, T., Mophuting, T., Spratt, J., Pienaar, D., Nyanisile, P. (2001) South Africa Survey 2000/01 Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations.

]

Forgey, H., Jeffery, A., Sidiropoulos, E., Smith, C., Corrigan, T., Mophuthing, T., Helman, A., Redpath, J., Dimant, T. (2000) South Africa Survey 1999/2000. Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations.

Foster, D. (1991) 'Race' and racism in South African Psychology. South African Journal Of Psychology, 21 (4): 203 – 209.

Foster, D. and Nel, E (1991) Attitudes and related concepts. In D. Foster and J. Louw-Potgieter (eds.) Social Psychology in South Africa. Johannesburg: Lexicon.

Gibson, J.L. and Gouws, A. (1998) Political Intolerance and Ethnicity: Investigating Social Identity. Indicator SA, 15 (3), 15 – 20.

Goldberg, D.T. (1998) The New Segregation. Race & Society, 1 (1): 15 – 32.

Goldberg, D.T. (1990) The Social Formation of Racist Discourse. In D.T. Goldberg (ed.) The Anatomy of Racism. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Heaven, P.C.L., Stone, C., Simbayi, L., and Le Roux, A. (2000) Human Values and Social Identities among samples of White and Black South Africans. International Journal of Psychology, 35 (1): 67 – 72.

Heritage, J. and Atkinson, J.M. (1984) Introduction. In M. Atkinson and J. Heritage (eds.) Structure of Social Action. Newcastle upon Tyne: Athenaeum Press Ltd.

Henriques, J. (1984) Social Psychology and the politics of racism. In J. Henriques, W. Hollway, C. Erwin, C. Venn, and V. Walkerdine (eds.). Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social regulation and subjectivity. London: Routledge.

Herrera, C. (2000) Integrating Research Ethics and Undercover Hospital Fieldwork. IRB, 22 (1): 1 – 4.

Human Rights Commission (2000) Faultlines: Inquiry into Racism in the Media. Pretoria: South African Human Rights Commission. (http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/commissions/1999/racisterms.html)

Hunter, N., Durrheim, K., Richter, L., Wilson, M., Asafo-Agyei, L. (2000) The Use of Demographics in Recruitment and Selection with a View to Analysing Patterns and Techniques of Exclusion. Management Dynamics, 9: 49 – 69.

Jenkins, R. (1986) Racism and Recruitment. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Johnson, P.C. (1999) Reflections on Critical White(ness) Studies. In T.K. Nakayama and J.N. Martin (eds.) Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity. London: Sage Publications, Inc.

Johnstone, F.A. (1994) Class Conflict and colour bars in the South African gold mining industry, 1910 – 26. In E. Webster, L. Bethlehem, A. Joffe and T. Selikow. Work and Industrialisation in South Africa. Randburg: Ravan Press.

Kelly, K. (1999) From encounter to text: collecting qualitative data for interpretive research. In M. Terre Blanche and K. Durrheim (eds.) Research in Practice. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

Lea, S. (1996) 'That ism on the end makes it nasty': talking about race with young white South Africans. South African Journal of Psychology, 26 (3): 183 – 189.

Lea, S.J., Bokhorst, F.D. and Colenso, J. (1995) The empirical relationship between the construct of traditional and symbolic racism. South African Journal of Psychology, 25 (4): 224 – 229.

Nakayama, T.K., and Krizek, R.L. (1999) Whiteness as a Strategic Rhetoric. In T.K. Nakayama and J.N. Martin (eds.) Whiteness: The communication of social identity. London: Sage Publications, Inc.

Pomerantz, A., Fehr, B.J. (1997) Conversation Analysis: An Approach to the Study of Social Action as Sense Making Practice. In T.A. van Dijk Discourse as Social Interaction. London: Sage.

Potter, J. (2000) Discursive Social Psychology: From attitudes to evaluative practice. European Review of Social Psychology, 9: 233 – 266.

Potter, J., and Wetherell, M. (1994) Analyzing discourse. In A. Bryman, and R.G. Burgess Analyzing Qualitative Data. London: Routledge.

Potter, J., and Wetherell, M. (1988) Accomplishing attitudes: Fact and evaluation in racist discourse. Text, 8 (1-2):69 – 89.

Potter, J., and Wetherell, M. (1987) Unfolding discourse analysis. In J. Potter and M. Wetherell Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour. London: Sage.

Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (2000).
Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act No. 4 of 2000. Government Gazette, 416 (20876). Pretoria.

Samura-Fredericks, D. (1998) Conversation Analysis. In G. Symon, and C. Cassell Qualitative Methods and Analysis in Organisational Research London: Sage.

Schegloff, E.A. (1993) Conversation Analysis and socially shared cognitions. In L.B. Reswick, J.M. Levine, and S .D. Teasley (eds.) Perspectives on socially shared cognition Washington: APA.

Schiffrin. D. (1988) Conversation Analysis. In F.J. Newmeyer (ed.) Linguistics: The Cambridge Survey Vol. IV: Language and socio-cultural context. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schlemmer, L. (2001) Race relations and racism in everyday life. Race Relations, 9: 2 – 12.

Sears. D.O. (1988) Symbolic Racism. In P.A. Katz and D.A. Taylor (eds.) Eliminating Racism: Profiles in Controversy. New York: Plenum, p. 53 – 85.

Sennett, J., and Foster, D. (1996) Social identity: Comparing white English-speaking South African students in 1975 and 1994. South African Journal of Psychology. 26 (4): 203 – 211.

Shotter. J. (1993) Conversational Realities: Constructing Life through Language. London: Sage.

Sidiropoulos, E., Jeffrey, A., Forgey, H., Chipps, T., Corrigan, T., Maphuthing, T., Helman, A., Dimant, T. (1998) South African Survey 1997/98. Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations.

Sidiropoulos, E., Jeffrey, A., Mackay, S., Forgey, H., Chipps, C., Corrigan, T. (1997) South Africa Survey 1996/97 Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations.

Sidiropoulos, E., Mashabela, H., Mackay, S., Gordon-Brown, C., Frielinghaus, J., Musiker, C., Swanepoel, H., Gallocher, R., Forgey, H. (1995) Race Relations Survey 1994/95. Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations.

Silverman, D. (2000) Doing Qualitative Research. London: Sage.

Smith, T.B. and Stones, C.R. (1999) Identities and racial attitudes of South African and American adolescents: A cross-cultural examination. South African Journal of Psychology, 29 (1): 23 – 29.

Statistics South Africa. South Africa in transition: October household survey of 1999. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.

Stevens, G. (1998) 'Racialised' discourse: Understanding perceptions of threat in post-apartheid South Africa. South African Journal Of Psychology, 28 (4): 204 – 214.

Stones, C.R., Heaven, P.L. and Bester, C. (1997) Political Change and Social Attitudes in South Africa. Social Behavior and Personality, 25 (2): 105 – 114.

Terreblanche, S. and Nattress, N. (1994) A periodisation of the political economy from 1910. In E. Webster, L. Bethlehem, A. Joffe and T. Selikow (eds.) Work and Industrialisation in South Africa. Randburg: Ravan Press.

Van Dijk, T.A. (1997) The study of discourse. In T.A. van Dijk (ed.) Discourse as structure and process. London: Sage, p.1 – 34.

Van Dijk. T.A. (1992) Discourse and the denial of racism. Discourse & Society, 3 (1): 87 – 118.

Van Dijk, T.A., Ting-Toomey, S., Smitherman, G., and Troutman, D. (1997) Discourse, Ethnicity, Culture and Racism. In T.A. van Dijk (ed.) Discourse as Social Interaction. London: Sage.

Wander, P.C., Martin, J.N., and Nakayama, T.K. (1999) Whiteness and Beyond: Sociocultural Foundations of Whiteness and Contemporary Challenges. In T.K. Nakayama and J.N. Martin (eds.) Whiteness: The communication of social identity. London: Sage Publications, Inc.

Webster, E., Alfred, L., Bethlehem, L, Joffe, A. and Selikow, T. (1994) Control, resistance and division of the gold mines: 1886 – 1924. In E. Webster, L. Bethlehem, A. Joffe and T. Selikow. Work and Industrialisation in South Africa. Randburg: Ravan Press.

Wetherell, M. (1998) Positioning and interpretative repertoires: Conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue. Discourse & Society, 9: 387 – 412.

Wetherell, M., and Potter, J. (1992) Mapping the Language of Racism: Discourse and the Legitimation of Exploitation. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Wetherell, M., and Potter, J. (1988) Discourse analysis and the identification of interpretative repertoires. In C. Antaki (ed.) Analysing Everyday explanations: a casebook of methods London: Sage.

Wiehahn, N.E. (Chair), Botes, C.A., Drummond, E.P., du Toit, C.W.H., Grobbelaar, J.A., Hechter, N.J., van der Walt, D. (Secretary), Mokoatle, B.N., Munsook, G., Neethling, T.S., Nieuwoudt, A.I., Steenkamp, T.I., Sutton, R.V. and van der Merwe, P.J. The Complete Wiehahn Report (1982) Johannesburg: Lex Patria Publishers.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1

<div align="center">

MY ADDRESS
MY TELEPHONE NUMBERS
MY E-Mail Address

</div>

### FACSIMILE TRANSMITTAL SHEET

| TO:<br>XXX | FROM:<br>Geraldine Martin |
|---|---|
| COMPANY:<br>XXX | DATE: |
| FAX NUMBER:<br>XXX | TOTAL NO. OF PAGES INCLUDING COVER:<br>3 |
| PHONE NUMBER:<br>XXX | RE:<br>Research |

XXX. as per our telephone conversation of this morning please find details as promised. Many thanks for agreeing to see me this afternoon at 15h30.

As mentioned I am currently conducting research as part of my Masters in Counselling Psychology through the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. I am therefore conducting face-to-face interviews with recruitment consultants from various recruitment agencies.

Due to the nature of the research topic (looking at employment equity / affirmative action, etc. and how the industry and clients have responded to changing legislation) I have committed myself to ensuring the anonymity of the participants and agencies. This means that the names of individuals / agencies are known only to me. I have tape-recorded all interviews and to ensure that anonymity is maintained I transcribe all the interviews conducted. All participants are offered the option of viewing the transcribed interviews and can make any changes or deletions to these. Since my intention is to publish in a recognise journal I have assured all participants that no names (either individual or agencies) will therefore be mentioned or included in transcripts, my thesis or in any articles published. This commitment is extended to yourself.

Should you wish to withdraw from the study at any stage this is possible and the research interview will not be used either in my thesis or in any articles published.

Usually the interview takes 45 – 60 minutes (depending on the time allocated by you). I usually start with general questions to locate the study. For example how long that agency has been operating, the number of years experience you have, etc. We then move on to look at employment equity legislation; the changes that have occurred as a result of this legislation; how clients have responded to the changes in legislation and whether there have been any difficulties in this regard. If there are difficulties how has the recruitment agencies handled these difficulties, etc.

I hope this gives you some idea of the questions that will be asked during the interview. Attached please find a copy of the consent form.

Yours sincerely


Geraldine Martin

# Informed Consent

Participation in research conducted by Geraldine Martin and supervised by Kevin Durrheim of the School of Psychology, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

I have been made aware of:

- The topic of Geraldine's research
- That anonymity will be ensured (as far as possible). That is the names of individuals / agencies or their clients will be known only to the researcher and will not be mentioned in the transcripts, thesis or in any articles published.
- That the interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed by the researcher
- That, should I wish to, I can have a copy of the transcribed interview
- That the researchers' intention is to publish in a recognised journal.
- That should I wish to withdraw at any stage from the study that I can do so
- That should I withdraw from the study the interview will not be used, without my consent, in the researchers thesis or any articles published

Knowing this I consent to participate in her study.

Thank you for your participation

# Appendix 2

## Interview Schedule

- Can you give me some idea of the kinds of activities you engage in every week?

- As far as job specs go, can you tell me more about them? What is a job spec? What are the sorts of things included in taking down a job spec? How does one go about filling one? Etc.

- How would a client typically ask for a job spec? How would the conversation go?

- Have you received job specs from clients that have been difficult to meet? If so, what kind of job specs are these? Can you give me an example? What made this particular job spec difficult to meet?

- What proportion of clients request candidates along racial lines?

- What sorts of jobs are these usually?

- Why do you think they make these requests for these sorts of jobs?

- How does the organisation respond to these requests?

- How has the organisation and your clients responded to the employment equity legislation?

- Are there any differences in the way the organisation makes sense of requests for 'black' and 'white' candidates and if so how?

- Is the way that you respond to racially based requests the same or different from how other consultants respond? How do you select and identify candidates on racial grounds? (Get details from them regarding advertising, looking for candidates on their books, etc.)

- How do other consultants talk about racially based requests

- How does the organisation talk about / discuss these requests?

- Has the organisation / you changed the way you work since the passing of Employment Equity legislation? If so what are these changes?

- Does the organisation have some sort of policy around this issue? Can you show it to me?

- What do you think about this policy? How does it work?